

OWS COVERAGE, p6-7

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #176, April 30 – May 22, 2012
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Yvonne Salazar, a resident farmer at La Finca del Sur, in the South Bronx.

Green New York

INSIDE THE CITY'S FAST-GROWING FOOD MOVEMENT

begins p8

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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 13 times a year on Mondays for our print and on-line readership of more than 100,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 700 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and with *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

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community calendar

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WED MAY 2

6:30-8:30pm • Free

LECTURE: NEW MODES OF PROFILING: MUSLIMS, ARABS AND SOUTH ASIANS IN POST-9/11 AMERICA. Learn how religious, ethnic and racial minorities are targeted by law enforcement under the guise of multiculturalism and trust.
CUNY Graduate Center • 365 Fifth Ave
212-817-7571 • gc.cuny.edu

THU MAY 3

All day • Free

DAY OF ACTION: BAN FRACKING. Join New Yorkers Against Fracking as they hold actions across the state, urging Governor Cuomo and legislators to support a state-wide ban on this dangerous method of gas drilling.
Various locations
202-683-2500 • nyagainstfracking.org

FRI-SUN MAY 4-6

Various times • \$11 & up

FILM FESTIVAL: WORKERS UNITE. Celebrate global labor solidarity by watching films that highlight the lives of workers around the world as they unite for social justice.
NYIT Auditorium • 1871 Broadway
212-675-5518 • workersunitefilmfestival.org

SAT MAY 5

6-8pm • Free

LAUNCH: CAMPAIGN TO FREE RUSSELL MAROON SHOATS. An evening of music, spoken word and discussion to kick-start an effort to free Russell Shoats, a 70-year-old political prisoner who has spent 40 years in prison — 30 of which have been spent in solitary confinement. Donations are encouraged.
St. Mary's Episcopal Church • 521 W 126th St
kanyaldalmeida@gmail.com
russellmaroonshoats.wordpress.com

9-11pm • Sliding scale

OPENING: '93 TO INFINITY. Come celebrate the history of the Lower East Side with a graffiti exhibit, photos and the legends who saw it all — in a gallery that continues to be a mainstay of the LES. Free food and drinks will be served.

A Gathering of the Tribes
285 E 3rd St, 2nd Fl
212-674-3778 • tribes.org

WED MAY 9- SAT MAY 12

Various times • Free

PERFORMANCE: LOVE STORY, PALESTINE. Members of the Palestinian Dance Troupe El-Funoun recreate segments from choreographer Yoshiko Chuma's documentary footage

from Ramallah, Palestine, in a performance that also features video projections and spoken word.

Ellen Stewart Theatre
66 E 4th St
212-475-7710 • lamama.org

FRI MAY 11

8pm • \$12

SCREENING: OPENING NIGHT, ROOFTOP FILMS. Join Rooftop Films as they kick off their 16th annual summer series with a night of short films from around the world.
Open Road Rooftop • 350 Grand St
718-417-7362 • rooftopfilms.com

SAT MAY 12

9am-6pm • Free

EVENT: BROOKLYN FOOD CONFERENCE. Eat, learn and think at this all-day family event promoting a healthy and sustainable food system. Speakers will discuss what's needed to grow a greener city and workshops will explore the impact of the global food economy.
Brooklyn Tech High School
29 Fort Greene Pl • Bklyn
347-921-3918 • bkfoodconference.org

8pm • Sliding scale

PERFORMANCE: NEW YORK CITY LABOR CHORUS. Now in their 21st year, the Chorus promotes union solidarity through song. Their dynamic repertoire combines the power and culture of union music with the great gospel, jazz, classical and folk traditions.
The Community Church of New York
Unitarian Universalist • 40 E 35th St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

TUE MAY 15

11am-7pm • Free

STREET FAIR: PARK SLOPE CELEBRATES DOMESTIC WORKERS. Join Park Slope residents for a day of festivities recognizing the importance of domestic workers. Sponsored by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice.
9th St & Prospect Park W • Bklyn
212-647-8966 • jfrefj.org

WED MAY 16

6:15-7:30pm • Free

INFO SESSION: CUNY LABOR STUDIES PROGRAM. Established in collaboration with NYC labor unions and CUNY, the Institute offers educational opportunities to union members and serves as an academic resource on issues of concern to the labor movement. RSVP required.
The Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies

UPCOMING EVENTS

TUE MAY 8 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY/FORUM: *OCCUPY THE ECONOMY: CHALLENGING CAPITALISM*, BY RICK WOLFF.

In his most recent book, economist Rick Wolff reaches back to the 1970s to show how the Occupy movement is responding to a deep crisis of capitalism.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THUR, MAY 10 • 7:30pm

DISCUSSION: ART AND CAPITAL, WITH PAUL WERNER.

Marxist art writer Paul Werner argues that culture is deeply implicated in capitalism, and that any progressive cultural activity must begin with a thorough analysis of the economics of arts and cultural institutions. Co-sponsored by the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

TUE MAY 22 • 7:30pm

BOOK PARTY/FORUM: *CANVAS OF THE SOUL* BY NIMAH ISMAIL NAWWAB.

Join Nawwab, the first Saudi Arabian poet to be published in the United States, for a discussion of her work, which seeks to build bridges of understanding related to global peace.

Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

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THU MAY 17

6-9pm • Free

SCREENING: *SCHMATT* — *RAGS TO RICHES TO RAGS*. Come commemorate Labor History Month by seeing this HBO documentary that tells the story of NYC's "rag" trade, from the past to the present. Discussion with filmmaker Mark Levin to follow.
NYU King Juan Carlos Center, Screening Rm
53 Washington Sq S
212 998-2637 • newyorklaborhistory.org

FRI MAY 18

7pm • Sliding scale \$25-\$250

TALK: THE BEGINNING IS NEAR: AN EVENING WITH MICHAEL MOORE AND CORNEL WEST. Commandeering the theme of the evening from an OWS protest sign, this talk will feature filmmaker Michael Moore and academic Dr. Cornel West in conversation about national and international politics.

Funds raised from this event will benefit the Brecht Forum.
Hunter College Assembly Hall, 695 Park Ave
212-242-4201 • brechtforum.org

FRI MAY 18-SUN MAY 20

Various times • \$20-\$40

EVENT: BROOKLYN FOLK FESTIVAL. This year's festival will feature the best in everything from old-time string-band music, folk and bluegrass, to Klezmer, Caribbean and Balkan folk music. Sponsored by the Down Home Radio Show and the Jalopy Theatre.
345 Jay St, Bklyn
718-395-3214 • brooklynfolkfest.com

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126 Crosby St.

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66 Leroy St.

Seward Park Library
192 E. Broadway at Jefferson St.

Whole Earth Bakery
130 St. Mark's Pl.

Mamoun's Falafel Restaurant
22 St. Mark's Pl.

Brecht Forum
451 West St.

Shakespeare & Co.
716 Broadway at Washington Pl.

Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.

14TH TO 96TH ST.
Epiphany Library
228 E. 23rd St.

Chelsea Square Restaurant
W. 23rd St. & Ninth Ave.

Columbus Library
942 Tenth Ave.

Manhattan Neighborhood Network
537 W. 59th St.

Muhlenberg Library
209 W. 23rd St.

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George Bruce Library
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526 W. 112th St.

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2900 Broadway

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9 W. 124th St.

Hamilton Grange Library
503 W. 145th St.

Uptown Sister's Books
W. 156th St. & Amsterdam

Bloomingdale Library
150 W. 100th St.

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Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.

BAM
30 Lafayette Ave.

Tillie's of Brooklyn
248 DeKalb Ave.

Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.

Video Gallery
310 Seventh Ave.

Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.

Pillow Café
505 Myrtle Ave.

Sisters' Community Hardware
900 Fulton St.

Pacific Street Library
25 Fourth Ave.

Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.

Blackbird Café
197 Bedford Ave.

'sNice Café
315 Fifth Ave.

High Bridge Library
78 168th St. & Woodcrest Ave.

Bedford Library
496 Franklin Ave.

Parkside Deli
203 Parkside Ave.

BRONX
Brook Park
141st St. & Brook Ave.

Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.

High Bridge Library
78 W. 168th St.

Mi Casa Bakery
18 E. Bedford Park Blvd.

STATEN ISLAND
St. George Library Center
5 Central Ave.

Port Richmond Library
75 Bennett St.

Everything Goes Book Café
208 Bay St.

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Tenants Catch a Break BUT RENT IS STILL TOO DAMN HIGH

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The Supreme Court won't do to rent controls what it did to campaign finance laws in 2010. On April 20, the Court announced that it would not consider a challenge to New York City's rent-stabilization law.

Manhattan landlords James and Jeanne Harmon filed the suit in 2008, claiming that rent regulations were an unconstitutional violation of their property rights. Two lower federal courts rejected it, but at least one Supreme Court justice thought it was worth considering.

If the Court had taken the case and struck down rent stabilization, it would have endangered the homes of one million New York households — almost one-third of the city's population. It would also have ended the regulations that protect renters in Westchester and Nassau counties; Jersey City, Bayonne, Hoboken, and other cities in New Jersey; Los Angeles, San Francisco, and several smaller California cities; and Washington, D.C.

However, doing that would have required reversing numerous legal precedents. Several previous Supreme Court decisions, the most recent in 1992, have held that rent controls are constitutional. To overturn them, longtime tenant attorney Tim Collins said in a statement, the Court would have had to return to its pre-New Deal legal philosophy, in which it consistently struck down child-labor and worker-safety laws. Since the late 1930s, numerous Court decisions have set strict standards for judging economic regulations unconstitutional, such as putting an unfair burden on property owners or being "arbitrary, discriminatory, or demonstrably irrelevant."

"In the final analysis, extreme conservative aspirations for heavily constitutionalized property rights cannot be reconciled with popular sovereignty," Collins concluded.

ed. "I feel like we just passed one large ominous ship in the night."

The Court's move leaves the city's status quo intact: Rent regulations are eroding while housing costs are exploding. The median rent for all rental apartments in the city in 2011 was \$1,100 a month, a \$150 increase from 2008, according to the Housing and Vacancy Survey, a Census Bureau study done every three years for the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

More than half of the city's tenants now spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent, and almost 30 percent pay more than half of what they make. Less than half the city's 2,173,000 rental apartments are still covered by rent regulations, with 987,000 rent-stabilized and 38,000 rent-controlled. Less than one-sixth rent for below \$700, and almost all of those are in

In reality, according to the Housing and Vacancy Survey, half of rent-stabilized households make less than \$37,000 a year, and their median rent is \$1,050 a month — more than one-third of their median income. The city Rent Guidelines Board, which sets allowable increases for rent-stabilized apartments each year, has never once denied owners a rent increase. When one of the board's five "public members" joined the two tenant representatives in voting for a rent freeze in 2004, Mayor Michael Bloomberg fired him. The remaining rent-controlled tenants, most of them elderly people who've lived in their apartments for more than 40 years, face annual increases of up to 7.5 percent.

Rent controls are not about "subsidizing" tenants, their supporters point out. They are an emergency measure to prevent landlords from taking advantage of the city's chronic

housing shortage — legally defined as less than 5 percent of apartments vacant and available for rent — to gouge tenants. Since World War II, the city's vacancy rate has never risen above 5 percent. It was 3.1 percent in the 2011 Housing and Vacancy Survey — and only 1.1 percent for apartments renting for less than \$800, with barely 5,000 available.

The inequities of younger, newer tenants paying much more than older, longtime renters are the direct result of the weakening of the state's rent laws in 1997. The real estate lobby won the ability to deregulate vacant apartments that rented for more than \$2,000 a month. That

change, then-Gov. George Pataki argued, wouldn't hurt "tenants in place." In other words, all the burden of higher rents on vacant apartments would fall on new tenants. (The loophole also gave landlords a strong incentive to harass "tenants in place.")

Pataki compounded the damage by virtually eliminating enforcement of the rent laws. No one knows how many apartments have been deregulated — estimates range

from 100,000 to 300,000 — or how many of them were illegally deregulated. Last year, a study by the Bushwick-based community group Make the Road New York estimated that almost half of apartments that were still rent-stabilized had illegally high rents.

Tenants have tried to get the vacancy-decontrol law repealed, but were thwarted in 2009, when since-indicted state Senator Pedro Espada switched parties to block a vote on it, and again last year, when Governor Andrew Cuomo refused to press the issue. The three most prominent Democratic mayoral hopefuls for next year — City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer — have all spoken out for strengthening rent controls in the past,

Continued on page 5



HITTING THE CEILING: Protesters gathered outside of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office in Midtown Manhattan last June to demand stronger rent control laws.

public or subsidized housing.

That hasn't stopped a propaganda offensive by the real estate lobby, propagating the myth that rent control is for Hollywood celebrities who pay \$800 for a nine-room apartment on the Upper West Side. Landlords, they claim, are being forced to "subsidize" these affluent tenants, while people in their twenties are forced to pay \$2,500 a month or more.



VIGIL IN THE BRONX

City Councilmembers Larry Seabrook (left) and Charles Barron (right) join Constance Malcolm to hold a photo of her son, Ramarley Graham, who was fatally shot Feb. 2 in the bathroom of his grandmother's Bronx home by Officer Richard Haste. Graham was unarmed and attempting to flush a bag of marijuana down the toilet. Police did not have a warrant to enter the home. Activists are holding marches in the neighborhood each Thursday to pressure Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson to indict Officer Haste for the killing.



INDY PHOTO TEAM WINS TWICE AT ANNUAL IPPIES AWARDS

The Independent's photo team was honored twice for its outstanding work at the annual Ippies Awards banquet on April 12. Andrew Stern won third place for Best Photo for his shot of two passionate young demonstrators marching through the Financial District last May (see above). Four *Indy* photographers — Amelia Kroles, Liz Borda, Julie Turkewitz and Ashley Marinaccio — shared third place for Best Photo Essay for their work ("We Contain Multitudes") which chronicled Occupy Wall Street protesters who were living at Zuccotti Park last fall and their reasons for joining the protest.

"It was so exciting to win, especially on behalf of *The Independent*," said Kroles, the paper's photo coordinator who won second place last year for her photo essay "Living Positively with HIV."

The Ippies were established a decade ago by the Independent Press Association of New York as the only journalism awards in New York that honor outstanding work by the city's ethnic and community media outlets. This year marked the first time they were held under the auspices of the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism.

Garry Pierre-Pierre, executive director of the CUNY J-School's Center for Community and Ethnic Media Initiative, said that submissions to this year's Ippies Awards were up 40 percent from 2011.

— *Independent Staff*

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Naked Abuse of Power

Supreme's Strip-Search Ruling Defies Common Sense, NY State Law Offers More Protection

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

When Albert Florence's wife, April, was pulled over for speeding by a New Jersey State Trooper in March 2005, little did she know that the incident would lead to her husband being arrested and spending almost two weeks in jail.

The couple — along with their 4-year-old son Shamar — were on their way to visit family when Florence was arrested for an outstanding warrant for an unpaid fine, even though he showed the trooper a receipt documenting that the fine had been paid in 2003.

Florence was charged with civil contempt and taken to Burlington County jail, even though failing to pay a fine is not a crime in New Jersey. Over the course of the next eight days, he was strip-searched twice before being released without charge.

In an interview with the *New York Times* in March, Florence, a finance executive for a car dealership, described standing in front of several guards and prisoners and being told to: "Squat and cough. Spread your cheeks."

Florence told the *Times* that the experience "...was humiliating. It made me feel less than a man. It made me feel not better than an animal."

Florence subsequently sued for violation of his Fourth Amendment right to not be subjected to unreasonable search and seizure.

While the federal judge who heard Florence's case (*Florence v. Board of Chosen Freeholders*) agreed that his rights had been violated, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the ruling in early April in a 5-4 decision, saying that the need to maintain safety and security in jails was more important than the privacy of detainees.

The ruling will allow jail officials to strip-search people arrested for any offense, however minor, before admitting them to jail, even if the officials have no reason to suspect the presence of contraband. With approximately 13 million Americans spending time in jail or prison every year — including an estimated 700,000 people in jail for less serious misdemeanor offenses — the impact

of the decision is far-reaching.

This decision runs counter to the recommendation from the American Correctional Association — the oldest and largest international correctional association in the world — which says that the use of strip-searches when there is cause for suspicion "best balances the need to safeguard jails with the need to protect the privacy and rights of the accused."

Further, the court's majority opinion, authored by Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, reinforces similar rulings in appeals courts in Atlanta, Ga., San Francisco, Calif. and Philadelphia, Pa., that supported searches no matter how minor the charge.

Some bizarre charges for which strip-searches would be permitted include violating a leash law, having outstanding parking tickets and riding a bike without an audible bell.

The decision in *Florence v. Board of Chosen Freeholders* expands on the late William Rehnquist's ruling on *Bell v. Wolfish* (1979), in which the court found that conducting body cavity searches of pre-trial detainees who had contact with visitors did not violate Fourth Amendment rights. The decision was controversial because it muddled the legal distinction

between detainees awaiting trial (who still retain the presumption of innocence) and those who have been convicted.

Fortunately, the New York state constitution — along with 10 other states, including California, Florida and New Jersey — has a prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures that has been firmly enforced statewide, even in prisons. To perform the type of search at issue in the Florence case, police would need a court warrant, which is only granted when there is a "reasonable suspicion" that "the arrestee secreted evidence inside a body cavity," according to a 2009 New York Court of Appeals decision.

Ann Schneider is a member of the NYC Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (nlgnyc.org). The opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the position of the organization as a whole.



Tenants

Continued from page 3

with Stringer the most frequent. However, they have also taken substantial donations from real estate interests, especially Quinn. In any case, a 1971 state law bars the city from enacting stronger rent laws on its own.

The Rent Guidelines Board will meet May

1 at 5:30 p.m. at Cooper Union to vote on its preliminary recommendation for next year's rent increases. Tenants turn out to protest at that meeting every year, and this year, it coincides with a massive Occupy Wall Street demonstration planned for nearby Union Square.

The board will set its final guidelines on June 21, and more protests are planned.



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OCCUPY

How to Succeed in Reoccupation Without Really Trying

BY NATHAN SCHNEIDER

Lately, I've been getting the feeling that Occupy Wall Street's past successes are starting to go to the heads of some of the people in the movement. We saw the glory days of Liberty Plaza, and also the recent spurt of momentum surrounding the brief March 17 reoccupation of Zuccotti Park in celebration of OWS's six-month anniversary. But as police departments across the country make it quite clear that occupations of any kind will not be tolerated, the mood has turned sour. The good old days, it seems, are not coming back. Instead, OWS has turned to a series of legal, temporary, roving "sleepful protests" — along Union Square, then outside bank branches and now at Wall Street itself.

More than a few organizers seem to be operating under the assumption that occupation — something comparable to last fall but somehow surely better — is a prerequisite for further political action. Consequently, some of the most talented organizers in New York (as well as, evidently, in Oakland and San Francisco) have been directing a considerable amount of energy into failed reoccupation attempts. When it's not reoccupying, the movement is celebrating the anniversaries of past successes instead of creating new ones. The more conversations I have with listless, frustrated organizers, though, the more I start to feel that right now this occupation-first logic is entirely backward.

This is a new time; the movement and its supporters are in a totally different place than they were last fall. Potential allies expect more from the movement — as they should. Many who were wholeheartedly behind it a few months ago seem to think it's over, or should be. The encampments lost much public support as the pressures of police harassment, a lack of resources to assist homeless Occupiers and other factors turned many into unsafe spaces. Videos of Occupiers behaving badly became fodder for a right-wing smear campaign that is now gearing up for any possible resurgence. This matters; in some sense, an occupation is only as good as its public support. That legitimacy is what makes it difficult for the state to mount an eviction without losing face.

Think of the early morning confrontation so many remember as the climax of Occupy Wall Street. On Oct. 14, thousands of people turned out before dawn to keep Mayor Bloomberg's cleaning crews out of the park. The moment those crews were routed, when the announcement came through the people's mic and the assembled crowd of Occupiers, union workers and supporters burst into cheers — that was amazing. But it took a lot of committed allies to make that happen. Right now, that support simply doesn't seem to be there. Evictions continue without much outcry.

So how can the movement recapture that support? How can it, even more than before, light up people's imaginations and make them want Occupy to stick around? Here's a modest proposal to a movement that tends not to take or need advice:

Challenge the power that affects the most

heard the word "Occupy" was, "Oh, those kids who saved my friend's home from foreclosure? I heard they're trying to take down the most dangerous bank in America!" Actions that directly challenge the economic violence of the system pose a dilemma for the entire society. You're asking everyone to choose sides — not about tents in a park, but about major features of everyday economic life. Do I want Bank of America to foreclose on my neighbor or not? Do I want my kids to spend their post-college lives enslaved by debt or not? These are serious political questions that have the potential to eclipse the nonsense the presidential candidates keep spouting. Suddenly the question of whether to allow the movement to occupy one space or another seems comparatively small.

As the movement shifts gears, it's hugely important to keep the spirit of occupation alive — though not necessarily in tents.

Occupiers are mapping the city's sites of injustice by sleeping out in the Financial District, but just as important is the sense of community at afternoon Town Square events and mutual aid on May Day. This sort of action is constructive rather than just disruptive, and it points the way toward a new, revolutionary society. Lots of people in the movement talk about wanting to see these occupations evolve into sustainable worker cooperatives and serious, large-scale mutual aid networks. But what if that happened in the

BETH WHITNEY



people's lives.

Right now, there are plenty of well-thought-out projects starting up in the movement that address the core issues that moved thousands of people to begin occupying Wall Street in the first place. There's Fight BAC, a project with the not-so-modest goal of taking down Bank of America. There are efforts to fight foreclosures and evictions through occupations, auction blockades or eviction defense. Disrupt Dirty Power is aimed at finally halting the corporate machine driving climate change. How about a massive student debt strike — anyone?

Projects with this level of focus tend to attract relatively small numbers of people compared to re-occupation attempts and rowdy marches. What if they became, for a while, the main business of the movement and the main outlet of its huge creativity? What if the first thing people thought of when they

context of making the most egregious, fundamental crises unmistakably clear — in the banks, in the schools, in politics, in how we treat our planet?

Compared to these massive tears in the fabric of society, I suspect that encampments in parks will seem like no big deal. Maybe the movement could even win back the right to occupy with much less effort. At the very least, there will be a whole lot more people standing up against the forces of repression and for the right to occupy. "Hey, we're changing the world with this movement," they'll say. "Why not let us have a park or a building and do some good with it?"

Nathan Schneider is an editor at *waging-nonviolence.org*, where an earlier version of this piece first appeared.

No Haven



BULLDOZER BULLIES: City employees cleared away the remains of the Occupy New Haven (ONH) encampment on the city's Upper Green April 18.

BY LAUREN TAKORES

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—Dust and the smell of pine wafted up from splintering wood pallets as Public Works Department bulldozers cleared out what remained of Occupy New Haven's encampment on April 18. After more than six months, the occupation of the northern section of the Upper Green in New Haven, Conn., was the longest-running outpost of the Occupy Wall Street movement in New England.

While the city initially tolerated the occupation — with Mayor John DeStefano inviting Occupiers to camp out starting Oct. 15 — city officials asked Occupiers to depart by “mid-March” in a written notice issued March 11.

Members of Occupy New Haven (ONH) took their struggle to continue the encampment to the courts. Their first two attempts resulted in last-minute rulings in favor of ONH; the decisions cited questions related to free speech and to who actually had the authority to evict the Occupiers, since the Green is privately owned but managed by the city. However, a day before the removal, a federal judge denied another stay for ONH, ruling that, while the encampment was a form of free speech, the Occupiers were violating city regulations.

“The past month has been an edgy time,” said Ray Neal, who has been involved with the comfort crew and speaking to the media on behalf of ONH during the occupation. “When you're faced with eviction over and over again from your home, it's a little bit wearing.”

The morning of the eviction, 10 Occupiers engaged in civil disobedience, locking arms around a tent decorated with a banner that read: “You can't evict an idea.” Police removed them one by one, arresting a total of 13 people. The Occupiers arrested were charged with disorderly conduct and interfering with police.

“The city wanted the Occupy New Haven protesters to leave and we came down and made that happen,” New Haven police sergeant Chris Rubino said that day. He described the relationship between ONH and

the police as positive — “But everything has to come to an end, and it was time for this to end.”

In the weeks leading up to the eviction, members of ONH met with city officials to discuss an alternate plan that still required the Occupiers to leave the Green and remove all structures. Members of ONH responded with a list of conditions for vacating the Green, including limiting the salaries of the mayor and police chief to \$35,950, the average income for a New Haven family.

“The only response we got to any of our demands was an eviction letter,” said Ben Aubin, who had been sleeping out on the Green since the beginning of the occupation and served as ONH's de facto leader. “Our opinion is that we're coming in on Yale's territory... The Yale graduation is coming up.”

Tom Conroy, deputy director of the Office of Public Affairs at Yale, said in an e-mail that Yale had no position on ONH or the city's eviction.

“Yale never brought the matter of Occupy New Haven to the city, either in support or in opposition,” he wrote.

Participants and supporters organized a variety of protests during the encampment, including demonstrations against Bank of America, the American Legislative Exchange Council and a Morgan Stanley recruiting event at Yale, but ONH's main focus was on creating a community governed by direct democracy. Occupiers also frequently participated in local actions against police brutality and reached out to the city's homeless population.

General Assemblies are still held on the Green three times a week.

Josh Smith, who was involved with ONH's media working group, thinks that the loss of the encampment won't hurt the efforts of ONH.

“The fact that we no longer have a physical encampment merely changes the dynamic of the protest. We don't need the camp to press on in our quest for social and economic justice. We've educated a lot of people and made our point as to what we want. Now, all we have to do is go and push for it,” Smith said.

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ZAPATISTA STORIES

HISTORY OF STATES

17 OCCUPY ENCAMPMENTS STILL STANDING

When *Adbusters* put out the call for 20,000 people to set up camp in lower Manhattan on Sept. 17, few people imagined the people who began living in Zuccotti Park would spark similar occupations in more than 650 cities and towns across the United States. Since then, local governments around the country have moved aggressively to dislodge these protest encampments. Seven months later only 17 occupations remain standing. They are located in:

Anchorage, Alaska	Milwaukee, Wis.
Asheville, N.C.	Sacramento, Calif.
Atlanta, Ga.	San Luis Obispo, Calif.
Wilmington, Del.	Tallahassee, Fla.
Dover, Del.	Tampa, Fla.
Fairbanks, Alaska	Vacaville, Calif.
Flint, Mich.	
Gainesville, Fla.	
Huntington Beach, Calif.	
Little Rock, Ark.	
Madison, Wis.*	

* Received eviction notice for April 30.

NEW YORK’S FOOD FUTURE

A shift in consumer preferences has led to a rapidly growing food movement with profound implications for the future of New York City’s food supply and the food and farming economies of the Northeast, the country and the world.

By THOMAS FORSTER AND NATHAN FORSTER

Behind glossy menus, chalkboard specials and supermarket produce displays, a steady stream of planes, trains and tractor trailers supply wholesale, retail and direct markets that feed 8 million New York City residents and nearly 20 million in the greater New York metropolitan region.

Hunts Point Terminal Market in the South Bronx is the world’s largest wholesale market. This 329-acre site supplies 60 percent of New York’s \$30 billion annual food market. The city also boasts the largest farmers market system in America and contains more than 600 community gardens. Supporting these regional agriculture systems are not-for-profit organizations and mission-driven companies that help regional farmers and food processors access new markets through innovative business partnerships.

The complexity of New York City’s huge urban food environment is powered by thousands of restaurants, bodegas, street vendors, specialty grocers, ethnic markets and food carts, and the country’s largest school feeding system serving nearly a million meals a day, as well as food banks, soup kitchens and pantries that serve over a half-million meals a day.

Best recent efforts to identify the full range of New York’s food supply, such as a recent study by Columbia University, came to this conclusion: nobody knows where all of New York’s food comes from. And yet the food system is changing, perhaps even transforming, in fundamental ways.

INTERRELATED

Local, regional, national and international food systems all interrelate in New York City. In 2012, the food landscapes that provide New York’s local and regional food supply are becoming more diverse, more integrated and more significant in terms of

their output. This rise in diversity and integration can be seen in places like the “black dirt” region in Orange County, 50 miles northwest of the city, where a new generation of young farmers is finding economic viability by accessing new markets through opportunities provided by food, health and agriculture policies.

Many city-based organizations facilitate policy implementation through programs designed to provide technical assistance, farming education and business planning support to family farms. In turn, farmers sell their products first through direct retail markets and Community Supported Agriculture (see sidebar, page 9), then through small-scale wholesale opportunities. It is

member of the Farmers Market Nutrition Program, which provides low-income families with checks that are used to buy food at farmers markets. Through partnerships with community organizations, the Hoeffners are able to get their food to the communities that need it most and receive fair prices for their quality products. This business alone now represents a large portion of the farm’s wholesale accounts.

GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

From New York’s early history, its immense consumer demand has had a global food footprint. But a shift in consumer preferences has led to a rapidly growing local food movement with profound implications for

sustain a local food system.

In Bushwick, Brooklyn, a community with high levels of poverty and limited food options, EcoStation:NY has begun to change how this community of New Yorkers buys, eats, and identifies with food. The Bushwick Campus Farm involves children in school gardens and cooking classes, helping them understand how food gets from the farm to the dinner table. The families of the students working in the gardens come out to the retail farmers market to buy locally grown produce and gain a deeper understanding of what their children are learning. Lastly, a rooftop farm supplies local restaurants with herbs and vegetables.

CHANGING PUBLIC POLICY

While community-based initiatives like EcoStation:NY help revive the romance of freshly prepared, recently harvested food, public policy needs to be integrated at city, state and federal levels to support a diverse and resilient food economy. The debate should not be about local vs. non-local food, but about how to better integrate the two, supporting a food environment that is a continuum between urban and rural landscapes. Besides diversifying the city’s food supply, the regional food economy creates jobs and retains businesses while enhancing the environment.

The region’s farmers, distributors and processors have begun to respond to the rising demand for healthy affordable and local food coming from consumers, restaurants, markets, schools and institutions. The demand for locally and regionally produced foods is estimated to be a quarter of the \$30 billion New York City food market, based on studies for redevelopment of Hunts Point Produce Market and increasing regional food in the city’s school system. The local and regional food economy is also bringing new public and private investment, business models and attention from local, state and

New York’s food justice movement seeks to rebuild food environments neighborhood by neighborhood.

common for farmers to supply a member CSA, participate in five to 15 retail markets in New York City or urban centers, and in the fall specialize in certain storage or harvest crops for wholesale accounts. What sets these farmers apart from many traditional farmers is their willingness to grow to meet retail market requirements.

It’s not just the new guys that are adapting to the new regional food system markets. Take the Hoeffners, for instance. They run a fourth-generation family farm in Montgomery, N.Y., that has supplied the city with wholesale produce for decades. Today’s wholesale marketing, however, is conducted primarily over the phone or the internet. That coupled with ever changing food packaging, safety, and marketplace regulations puts the traditional wholesale family farms of New York and adjacent states on the margins of wholesale agriculture business. Now, Jack Hoeffner and his family have found a different way to engage in the New York food system. Hoeffner Farms is a registered

the future of New York City’s food supply and the food and farming economies of the Northeast, the country and the world. In the 1990s, before the explosive growth of restaurant and retail store interest in local foods, only the farmers markets, early CSAs and a few stores carried “local.”

Throughout the five boroughs, community and rooftop gardens, local food enterprises and farmers markets have been multiplying in nearly viral fashion. Links between neighborhoods and near-urban farms through farmers markets and CSA programs have helped New Yorkers connect with regional farmers. These relationships proved providential in relief funds raised for beleaguered farms hit by flooding after Tropical Storm Irene last year.

The contribution of urban gardens and farms to the food supply of a large city like New York may seem insignificant, but the importance of urban farming, gardening and environmental education lies in its role in creating the local food culture that will

WHAT IS A CSA?

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) allows city residents to have direct access to fresh, high-quality produce. When you become a member of a CSA, you’re purchasing a “share” of vegetables from a regional farmer. Weekly or bi-weekly, from June until October or November, your farmer will deliver that share of produce to a convenient drop-off location in your neighborhood for members to pick up.

CSA members pay for an entire season of produce upfront (typically \$400-\$600). This early bulk payment enables your farmer to plan for the season, purchase new seeds, make equipment repairs and more. CSA members share in the harvest —

when there is a good growing season, everyone benefits. When the season is not so good, members shoulder the risk.

Shares usually include seven to 10 types of vegetables, enough for a family of two to three people. Most CSAs also offer half shares for smaller households or busy New Yorkers who frequently eat out. The number of CSAs in New York City has grown from one in the mid-1990s to more than 100 today.

Many CSAs also offer the option of other produce from local farms. For a few extra dollars a week, in addition to your vegetables, you can add fruit, eggs, meat and even flowers to your order.

Most CSAs have a variety of payment plans to allow members flexibility in paying for their shares. Some CSAs can arrange payments in installments, accept food stamps, offer sliding scale fees and provide scholarship shares.

Neighborhood CSA groups are run by members. A rotating core group of volunteers take on much of the administrative management of the CSA. This can include signing up new members, collecting members payments, running the distribution site and planning community-building or educational events. This frees up the farmers to focus on growing and delivering the vegetables.

To find out more about CSAs in New York City, see justfood.org

This article was adapted from justfood.org and sustainabletable.org.

federal agencies and elected officials.

Until recently, the demand for more local food had not been incorporated into the city's economic development and planning policies. That has all changed. Starting with the City Council's FoodWorks blueprint for New York's food system and the addition of food to PlaNYC, the city's long-term sustainability plan, the future of the city's food and nutrition security are a fixture in the city's planning for the future.

Many other cities in the United States and around the world are coming to realize that the economic and climate-related vulnerability of food supply necessitates stronger regional linkages that mutually benefit urban and rural areas. Part of the response of cities, including New York, is the engagement of new food policy and planning professionals so city officials can become better managers of their food supply.

HUNGER IN NYC

However, the transformation of the food supply for cities is not just about markets, planning and economic development. One out of six New Yorkers is enrolled in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) and over 80 percent of New York school children are eligible for federally-subsidized school meals. Hunger and poverty are realities for millions of New Yorkers. In the poorest neighborhoods access to healthy affordable food is most lacking and chronic diseases like obesity and diabetes are the most epidemic.

New York's food justice movement seeks to rebuild food environments neighborhood by neighborhood, with access to food from community gardens and farmers markets, more healthy foods in existing and new markets and links to regional farms. It is a powerful grassroots movement aimed at social development and equity through rebuilding

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food system from the
tom up, and mirrors
lar movements across
country.

The pressure of
system volatility
larger mar-
kets



and
supply
chains,
along with
the demand
for more access
to healthy food
in underserved
markets (some-
times called "food
deserts"), are
changing the
politics of
food, which
is in turn
transforming
food policy. The
food system is shaped by local,
state, federal and even interna-
tional policy in ways that are not nec-
essarily obvious.

Whether low-income families can use
their SNAP or Women, Infants and Chil-

dren (WIC) benefits for fresh local food in
farmers markets, whether there are gov-
ernment resources for innovative business
models and food hubs or whether farming
practices preserve water and soil quality —
policy can either help or hinder. Producers
and consumers have begun to mobi-
lize for policies and programs that
benefit consumers and farmers, in
both urban and rural areas.

Creative approaches that com-
bine markets for small or larger
farmers, integrate urban and ru-
ral food environments and address
the needs of underserved urban and
rural communities do exist, but need
scaling up and resources.

With greater engagement
of citizens, officials and
organizations across the
city and region, the fu-
ture of New York City's
food supply may con-
tinue to change in positive
ways and in a generation, be
healthier, more regionally based and
more sustainable. Whether it is the
food we eat, the crops we plant,
the animals we raise, the mar-
kets we cultivate or the poli-
cies we promote, no choice
is too small to make a big
difference in the fu-
ture of our food
system.

Thomas Forster teaches at the New School Food Studies Program. Nathan Forster is the Wholesale Greenmarket Co-ordinator for GrowNYC, the nonprofit organization that oversees New York City's 53 greenmarkets.

FOOD CO-OPS IN THE CITY

Food co-ops are member-owned and operated businesses that allow participants to purchase organic or natural foods at a lower cost in exchange for their time commitments. For many members, their co-ops' egalitarianism and democratic decision-making are as important as the discounts on the organic Basmati rice. Here are four storefront co-ops currently active in New York City:

Fourth Street Co-op 58 E. 4th St., Manhattan

Located on an East Village block that includes several Off-Off Broadway theaters, this cozy little co-op has managed to survive despite Whole Foods moving in a few blocks away, thanks to a loyal membership that values both the store's quality food and its spirit of community. Members who work weekly shifts receive 15-20 percent discounts while non-members are allowed to shop as well.

Park Slope Food Co-op 782 Union St., Brooklyn

Founded in 1973, Park Slope is the colossus of food co-ops with 16,000 members and \$45 million in annual sales. It's known for its great selection and low prices, but only members can shop here. To remain in good standing, each member must report for her or his nearly three-hour work shift once every four weeks or risk losing shopping privileges.

Flatbush Food Co-op 1415 Cortelyou Rd., Brooklyn

Launched in 1976 as a buying club by early aficionados of organic foods, the Flatbush Food Co-op has blossomed into a full-blown storefront over the past three decades, serving residents of Flatbush, Ditmas Park and Kensington.

Greene Hill Food Co-op 18 Putnam Ave., Brooklyn

Greene Hill is the new kid on the block having just opened in December. Members are required to work a shift every four weeks but Greene Hill is not as strict (so far!) about enforcing its work mandate, much to the relief of some of its newer members who migrated over from the Park Slope Food Co-op. Greene Hill has faced charges of elitism since the *New York Times* reported in March that only 3.8 percent of the co-op's 800 members are low-income residents.



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Up with Cows, Down with Hoossegows

ENDING PRISONS, ONE UPSTATE MILK FARM AT A TIME

BY ARI PAUL

Veteran activist Lauren Melodia noticed something during a bus trip to Canuco Farm in upstate New York in New Paltz. She was taking a group of low-income, mostly African-American teenagers from a housing project in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, to visit the farm associated with their neighborhood's local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. During the drive, some of the youths noted that they had never been north of the city for any reason — other than to visit a relative in prison.

Melodia saw a new opportunity to marry her two passions: food justice and prison reform, and Milk Not Jails was born.

The rural upstate economy relies heavily on agriculture and prisons — and as criminal justice reform activists note, the New York prison population is shrinking. Crime has decreased steadily since the 1980s, and Governor Andrew Cuomo has closed seven prisons during his first term, reducing the number of prisons upstate to 59. Reforms in 2009 to the draconian Rockefeller Drug laws reduced the stream of prisoners going upstate; instead, courts have sought alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.

The central remaining obstacles to more prison reform are upstate politicians and the corrections officers' union, the New York State Correctional Officers and Police Benevolent Association, which wants to keep prisons open to keep people employed. The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, with a budget of \$2.9 billion, currently employs more than 19,000 correction officers to supervise approximately 56,000 inmates.

Milk Not Jails, which was founded in

2010, seeks to address the economic problems of rural upstate New York by promoting the high-road dairy sector, and thus, over time, reducing the upstate economy's dependence on prison jobs. Through building relationships with more than 250 small-scale dairy farmers, the organizers — based in Manhattan — plan to distribute Milk Not Jails' dairy products at CSAs and buying clubs downstate. There are 11 CSAs on board so far, with the number growing as more CSA members urge their groups to join.

"We're not leading any new political effort," said Brenden Beck, an organizer with Milk Not Jails. "We're supporting the already robust organizing around agricultural reform and prisons reform going on in the state."

The group's platform includes preserving state farmlands, legalizing the sale of raw milk products, increasing the use of state farm food in schools and passing the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act in the New York State Assembly, which, according to the group's literature, would "allow judges to sentence domestic violence survivors convicted of crimes di-

rectly related to the abuse they suffered to shorter prison terms and, in some cases, to community-based alternative-to-incarceration programs instead of prison."

There are 5,380 dairy farms in New York, which make up more than half of

the state's farming economy. Milk Not Jails hopes to use its products not only to bring money to upstate farms, but also to fund prison reform campaigns and educate consumers about how supporting the upstate dairy economy helps undercut the power of the prison industry.

The plan is not without problems. One of the original farmers involved with the project has since ceased operating due to financial difficulties. Farming has high overhead, and land speculation has driven up prices in parts of upstate, forcing many small farmers out of the market.

The prison system creates civil service jobs with pensions and benefits, and it isn't clear that, if prisons close due to an inmate population decline, the proliferation of organic dairy farms could employ the same number of people and provide jobs with equivalent benefits.



SOPHIE FORBES

A GOOD CAUSE...AND GOOD FOR YOU: Lauren Melodia of Milk Not Jails stands in front of the Ronnybrook Farm's booth at the Fort Greene Park Greenmarket. The farm is one the many joining in the campaign to move the upstate economy away from the prison industry and toward sustainable dairy farming.

"We think that the quality of jobs is based on what creates [them], and a job based on locking people up is not a good job," Beck said.

"You can't really dispute that it is bad policy to base prison policy on economic need," Melodia added.

But the group's upstate allies are still optimistic. Downstate, Milk Not Jails already has agreements to distribute products at CSAs in the Lower East Side, Park Slope, DUMBO, Harlem and Sunnyside.

"It's a way to open up dialogue, to talk about where these prisons are placed," said Steven Googin, who operates a small dairy farm outside of Syracuse and hopes to get other farmers from Central New York on board to support Milk Not Jails and transport their products to the city. "How do you have this wholesome farm next to something that is so cold and dark?"

He added that creating a healthier, more sustainable food system for the state would have a direct impact on the way society views criminal justice.

"When you're starting to eat better you get healthier and think healthier and choose to do things, you build community, you create a society that doesn't have the need to send people to jail," Googin said. "There's more of a community that looks out for each other, if someone is having a hard-knock life, maybe you'd lend them a hand."

Beck sees this model becoming a national, ecumenical effort: "In California, it will be Avocados Not Jails. In Pennsylvania, it will be Lettuce Not Jails."

He added, "Our long term goal is to be Farms Not Jails." Or perhaps, if his dream of society dismantling prisons is one day realized, "just Farms."

No Frackin' Way

DRILLING RISKS UPSTATE FOOD SUPPLY

BY ERIC WELTMAN

For New York City residents, fracking may seem like a distant problem — a hazard facing those living in regions where there are more trees than people. But fracking is a risk to anyone who drinks water, eats food and breathes air — that is, all 8 million who reside in our city's five boroughs.

Fracking is a highly dangerous method of drilling for natural gas that involves blasting a toxic soup of chemicals, sand and water underground to release gas that is trapped in shale rock formations. The toxic chemicals that remain underground, and those brought back to the surface in the wastewater, along with hazardous air emissions, are a threat to public health and the environment. Further, the release of methane, which occurs during this process, accelerates climate change.

But while there is growing awareness of

fracking's threats to our water, its potentially disastrous impacts on food and agriculture are less recognized. If Governor Andrew Cuomo allows fracking in New York, it could greatly damage our state's vibrant agricultural sector, while risking the safety of our food.

New York is an agricultural state — as difficult as that is to believe for concrete jungle inhabitants — where one-quarter of land area is used for farming. The production of apples, dairy products, wine and other fruits and vegetables provide jobs to thousands of New Yorkers.

Of course, food is a crucial part of our city's identity, with famous chefs, bagels, pizza and cuisines from every corner of the planet. A growing movement of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), community gardens and Slow Food activists is fueling both the demand and availability of locally produced, healthy food.

Fracking puts all of this at risk, a point that producers, sellers and advocates of healthy food have recognized. Chefs for the Marcellus, the Northeast Organic Farming Association: New York, Slow Food NYC, the Brooklyn Food Coalition, the Park Slope Food Co-op and Food & Water Watch are among those calling on Gov. Cuomo and the state legislature to ban fracking in New York to help protect the state's farms and food.

As Dr. Sandra Steingraber, an environmental studies professor at Ithaca College, explains, "Upstate New York is a national hot spot for organic agriculture. Cows, wheat fields, vineyards, maple syrup and apple orchards, all of this is part of our public health system. They're part of a healthy chain. And each of these crops requires clean water. They're all affected badly by exposure to air pollution."

Steingraber is the chair of New Yorkers

Against Fracking, a coalition that is working to ban fracking in New York. A core element of the coalition's strategy is to engage diverse constituencies in the fight against fracking, and to bring that influence to bear on Gov. Cuomo and the state legislature. To that end, the coalition is reaching out — from Long Island to Buffalo and everywhere in between — to farmers and other food producers, faith leaders, business owners, health professionals and others who would be impacted by fracking's threats to our health, economy and communities.

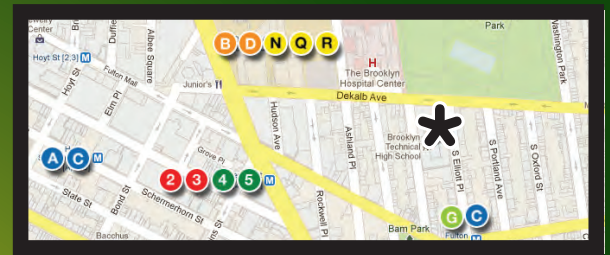
Eric Weltman is senior organizer for Food & Water Watch in New York. To learn more about anti-fracking efforts, visit FoodandWaterWatch.org, and NYAgainstFracking.org

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Springing into Action

TEXT BY JOHN TARLETON
PHOTOS BY SOPHIE FORBES, AMELIA HOLOWATY
KRALES, ASHLEY MARINACCIO & JULIE TURKEWITZ

From Bed-Stuy to the Bronx, New Yorkers returned to their community farms to begin planting new crops as the weather warmed in April. Many of these farms are located in predominantly people of color neighborhoods where residents have worked to transform abandoned lots into flourishing gardens that serve many functions: community gathering space, urban refuge, a classroom for teaching youth about growing food and a source of fresh fruits and vegetables.



SOPHIE FORBES

BED-STUY FARM

Built on a former neighborhood garbage-dump-turned-urban-oasis, Bed-Stuy Farm provides food grown on the site to Central Brooklyn residents who are at risk of hunger. (Above) Abra Morawiec, an AmeriCorps Volunteer with the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, works with Brooklyn Rescue Mission farm interns to integrate compost in to the dirt to be used in raised beds. (Right) Inspecting a pea that is growing in one of the greenhouses at Bed-Stuy Farm. The farm is overseen by Brooklyn Rescue Mission, a community-based organization that uses urban farming as a starting point for community empowerment. For more, see brooklynrescuemission.org/Bedstuyfarm.aspx



SOPHIE FORBES



Bed-Stuy Farm co-founders Rev. Robert Jackson (left) and his wife Rev. DeVanie Jackson. Through the garden, “those who are most food insecure get the most premium food,” she says.

AMELIA HOLOWATY KRALES



ASHLEY MARINACCIO



ASHLEY MARINACCIO

LA FINCA DEL SUR

La Finca del Sur (or “Farm of the South”) is an urban farmer cooperative led by Latina and Black women and their allies. Located at 138th Street and the Grand Concourse in the South Bronx, La Finca kicked off its third season on Sat. April 14 with a full day of activities. Clockwise from Top: (Above left) Community leaders teach neighborhood children about gardening and assist them in planting seeds. Children also participated in educational art projects throughout the day that combined nature with art. (Above Right) A community volunteer waters the newly seeded plot. (Right) Members from local environmental nonprofits visited La Finca del Sur to teach community members and volunteers about composting, horticulture and how to maintain the garden. Volunteers also participated in classes, lectures and workshops on issues such as gentrification. (Bottom Photos) Volunteers help prepare the garden for the spring and summer. Volunteers spent the day planting seed, spreading soil and organizing garden materials for the upcoming season. For more, see bronxfarmers.blogspot.com.



ASHLEY MARINACCIO

EAST NEW YORK FARMS

(Below) Participants in East New York Farms enjoy a laugh as they prepare for a new season. Located at the corner New Lots and Schenk Avenues in outer Brooklyn, East New York Farms trains local teenagers to work the land they live on. Each year, about 30 teens join for a nine-month paid internship program where they learn to care for a half-acre organic garden. For more, see eastnewyorkfarms.org.



JULIE TURKEWITZ



JULIE TURKEWITZ

(Above) A local resident tends her garden bed at East New York Farms while the 3 train rumbles overhead.



ASHLEY MARINACCIO



ASHLEY MARINACCIO

Groceries for the Rich, Diesel Fumes for the 99%

FRESHDIRECT'S MOVE ANGERS SOUTH BRONX NEIGHBORHOOD

BY ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA

The latest in a series of struggles between two competing visions of development is playing out in the South Bronx, on a 100-square-acre section of waterfront property in the neighborhood of Mott Haven. To some, development appears to be defined by economic growth alone. That would include Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. — who on Feb. 7 announced a deal to provide the online grocery-delivery company FreshDirect with \$127.8 million in tax breaks and public subsidies to relocate their operations from Long Island City, Queens to the South Bronx. The new distribution center is expected to open in 2015.

For South Bronx Unite, a group of neighborhood residents and city-wide supporters fighting to halt the deal, it is a vision that privileges industrial development and corporate interests over the welfare of the community. In response, the group has launched a campaign to boycott FreshDirect and is pushing local elected officials to question the failures of due process underlying the proposed move.

“For development to work, there has to be a balance,” said Mychal Johnson, a South Bronx activist and member of Community Board 1. “It’s not just about job creation or residential housing, but about standard of living and quality of life. It’s about giving South Bronx residents access to their waterfront, to green space and fresh air.”

According to members of South Bronx Unite, there is little that residents stand to gain from the FreshDirect deal with respect to quality of life — and much they stand to lose.

In a community that suffers from asthma rates five times higher than the national average, the increased levels of air and noise pollution that would accompany FreshDirect’s deliveries threaten to exacerbate already serious public health concerns, critics say. The site where FreshDirect plans to build its new facility is located on the Harlem River Yards, which currently hosts a *New York Post* printing and distribution center, a FedEx hub and a solid waste transfer sta-

tion. These operations involve thousands of daily diesel truck trips through the largely residential neighborhood. If built, the FreshDirect facility would bring in approximately 2,000 more truck trips per day, according to South Bronx Unite, and occupy one of the last South Bronx waterfront areas with the potential to be used for recreational public space.

Not only that, but critics have also noted that FreshDirect caters almost exclusively to an affluent clientele whose lifestyles and livelihoods are far removed from the economic realities of the South Bronx. FreshDirect does not serve the area, limiting its deliveries to the wealthier Riverdale, Kingsbridge and Woodlawn sections in the Northern Bronx. Nor does the company accept EBT benefits, which are relied on by 66 percent of South Bronx residents. And although authorities have brought in the deal under the banner of job creation, whether any of these jobs would go to South Bronx residents remains uncertain.

While FreshDirect has agreed to address some of these concerns, promising to phase in environmentally friendly vehicles, expand its service in the Bronx, accept EBT benefits and allocate 30 percent of the 1,000 new

South Bronx Unite says there is little that residents stand to gain from the deal — and much they stand to lose.

jobs projected for the next decade to Bronx residents, there is no legal agreement to oblige the company to do so.

“It’s a bad deal on every level,” said Harry Bubbins, a South Bronx resident and founder of Friends of Brook Park. “Meanwhile, the South Bronx has had its own aspirations for the waterfront for many years, and the larger issue for the city and the region is the appropriate economic and environmental use of the Harlem River Yards.”

While South Bronx Unite’s options for reversing the decision are limited, the group



DIRECT OPPOSITION: Mychal Johnson, a South Bronx activist and member of Community Board 1, stands in front of the Harlem River Yards where FreshDirect will build its new distribution center with \$127.8 million in public subsidies.

\$500,000 a year in rent to the DOT?,” Bubbins said.

The group hopes to eventually have the lease between the DOT and Galesi negated, according to Kristin Hart, a long-time activist and Kingsbridge resident who works with South Bronx Unite. In the meantime, its members are reaching out to FreshDirect customers in wealthy neigh-

borhoods such as the Upper East and West Sides to participate in the boycott.

“It takes a long time to build something like this, but we need to go through the customer base,” Hart said. “If their customers start to question the company’s practices, then FreshDirect may begin to pay attention.”

is calling on councilmembers Melissa Mark-Viverito and Maria del Carmen Arroyo to propose a resolution to the City Council for increased oversight on the allocation of New York City Industrial Development Authority funds, which in the case of the FreshDirect deal were promised before the single public hearing on the matter occurred on Feb. 10.

“This deal deserves more scrutiny,” said Bettina Damiani, Project Director of Good Jobs New York, a public subsidy watchdog organization. “The fact that the city and FreshDirect didn’t make the effort to emphasize what a large subsidy package this was, and what impact it would have on the South Bronx community, certainly raises serious transparency and due diligence questions.”

In a letter being drafted to the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT), which owns the land on which FreshDirect proposes to build, South Bronx

Unite is also challenging the lease that allows such deals to transpire on public property and the outdated environmental impacts assessment of building on the site.

In 1991, DOT leased the site to the Galesi Company, which subsequently subleased parcels of it to the *New York Post*, FedEx and Waste Management, Inc.

“We’re hoping that as we defeat FreshDirect our local elected officials will look at the waterfront and say, ‘Why does one company have a 99-year-lease for almost 100 acres of waterfront property while paying only

CAN YOU SPARE \$128 MILLION?

While the city government is set to fork over \$127.8 in subsidies and tax breaks to grocery-delivery company FreshDirect, The Independent found some other potential uses for these funds that would actually benefit New Yorkers:

- One school year’s worth of cafeteria lunches for 474,000 students.
- Yearly starting salary for around 2,800 public school teachers.
- One year of monthly health insurance premium payments for over 16,900 Freelancers Union members and their families.
- Two years of rent payments for 12,200 units of public housing.
- A years’ worth of monthly MetroCards for 102,400 city residents.

—Independent Staff

Where's the Beef?

SUBSIDIES ARE NOT ENOUGH TO FIX FOOD DESERTS

By J. MIJIN CHA

Last summer, a Western Beef store in the East Tremont section of the South Bronx became the first supermarket in the city to receive funding through the city's Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program. The FRESH initiative provides financial and zoning incentives to entice supermarket chains to build new stores in neighborhoods that lack access to fresh, wholesome foods.

The project, which involved tearing down an existing Western Beef store and rebuilding an expanded store on a nearby lot, cost the chain more than \$15 million — but through the FRESH program, it also received \$5.6 million in real estate and sales tax exemptions and a mortgage recording tax waiver worth \$154,000. According to Tom Moranzoni, chief financial officer for Western Beef, the store created 120 jobs, with 80 percent of employees living within four to five blocks of the store.

Since then, three more supermarket chains — Associated, Food Bazaar and Fine Fare — have been approved to receive FRESH funding to construct, renovate or expand additional stores in the Bronx. Eleven grocery stores in total have benefited from FRESH funding since the program's inception in 2009.

In a borough where nine out of 12 community districts qualify as food deserts — areas where a substantial number of residents live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store — increased access to fruits and vegetables is essential. Bronx residents suffer from disproportionately high rates of obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Neighborhood bodegas rarely offer much beyond sodas and packaged foods, and fast food chains such as McDonald's and Kennedy Fried Chicken fail to offer healthy meal options.

However, access to fresh food is just one part of the solution. In his 2009 report, "Good Food, Good Jobs: Turning Food Deserts into Job Oases," Joel Berg, director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, noted that "for a community to have good nutrition... food must be affordable; food must be available; and individuals and families must have enough education to know how to eat better."

THE REAL COSTS

In justifying these corporate subsidies, politicians often pit health concerns, like access to fresh food, against economic interests, like job creation. The argument is that while supermarket chains may be taking money out of the community through tax and real estate exemptions, they bring money in by creating jobs and other kinds of secondary economic benefits.

In a borough where the unemployment rate has spiked to 14 percent and a neighborhood where 39 percent of residents live in poverty, any job creation can seem alluring.

While part of the FRESH program's goal is to improve local economies, it imposes no wage or benefit requirements on participat-

ing stores. Since supermarket chains like Western Beef pay workers less than a living wage (which in New York City means \$10 per hour with benefits, or \$11.50 per hour without benefits for full-time employees, according to Mayor Bloomberg's 2002 living wage ordinance), the city is forced to make up the difference through food and housing benefits. In essence, the taxpayer pays twice: once for the big giveaway package and then again in providing a basic safety net for the company's workers, whose full-time jobs do not pay them enough to feed and house their families.

SMALLER SOLUTIONS, BIGGER IMPACTS

What, then, are the solutions? Food justice activists propose a number of possibilities. Increasing access to farms and farmers' markets would help in re-establishing local distribution channels for fresh fruits and vegetables. Accepting government benefits at farmers' markets is a good first step, but only if the produce and fresh food at the markets are affordable for people on tight budgets.

In justifying these corporate subsidies, politicians often pit health concerns, like access to fresh food, against economic interests, like job creation.


Communities need radical approaches that reach beyond the current food delivery system; the system itself needs to be redesigned by the people it serves. One promising local example in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of central Brooklyn is the Child

Development Support Corporation (CDSC), a community-based nonprofit that provides a range of services to help residents become self-sufficient and self-reliant. In addition to a food pantry, the CDSC boasts a 250-square-foot indoor farm that uses hydroponic techniques to grow a range of vegetables, including dark-leaf lettuce, bok choy and collard greens. Clients can grow fresh produce year-round and take workshops on how to grow greens hydroponically in their own homes. The CDSC farm provides produce for hundreds of families each week.


In Brownsville, Brooklyn, Nora Painten, a teacher at P.S. 323, has created the Student Farm Project, which is mobilizing students and volunteers from the community to transform an 8,000-square-foot vacant lot near the school into an educational student farm. The farm will have a chicken coop, beehive and outdoor classroom and grow dozens of vegetables and herbs. Participants will tend the farm and gain hands-on skills training.

A kickstarter campaign for the Brownsville project raised more than \$24,000 last fall, and the CDSC started construction on its indoor farm last year thanks to a one-year \$24,000 grant from the United Way. Instead of padding corporate profits, shouldn't public funds be used to invest in communities and the people who live in them?

J. Mijin Cha is a senior policy analyst in the Sustainable Progress Initiative at Demos. She is an adjunct professor at Fordham University School of Law and serves on the board of the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment. You can follow her on twitter @jmijincha.



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AFRICA'S FRANKENFOODS

Western interests led by Monsanto and the Gates Foundation claim genetically modified crops will revolutionize agriculture in African nations like Kenya. Critics warn the technology represents a new form of colonialism ill-suited to the needs of the continent's millions of small farmers.

TEXT & PHOTOS BY PAIGE AARHUS

NAIROBI, Kenya—In the sprawling hills of the Kangundo district in Kenya's Eastern Province, just a few hours outside of capital city Nairobi, Fred Kiambaa has been farming the same small, steep plot of land for more than 20 years.

Born and raised just outside Kathiini Village in Kangundo, Kiambaa knows the ups and downs of agriculture in this semi-arid region. He walks up a set of switchbacks to Kangundo's plateaus to tend his fields each morning and seldom travels further than a few miles from his plot.

Right now, all that remains of his maize crop are rows of dry husks. Harvest season finished just two weeks ago, and the haul was meager this time around.

"Water is the big problem, it's always

water. We have many boreholes, but when there is no rain, it's still difficult," he said.

Kiambaa and his wife, Mary, only harvested 440 pounds of maize this season, compared to their usual 2,200. They have six children, meaning there will be many lean months before the next harvest, and worse: Though March is Kenya's rainiest month, it's been mostly dry so far.

"The rain surely is not coming well this year. Rain is the key. We can only pray," he said.

WONDER CROPS?

Farmers like Kiambaa are central to a push to deploy genetically modified (GM) technology within Kenya. In recent years, donors such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have invested millions of dollars into researching, developing and promoting GM technology, including drought-resistant maize, within the country — and have found a great deal of success in doing so through partnerships with local NGOs and government bodies.

The Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), a semi-autonomous government research institution, recently announced that after years of trials, genetically modified drought-resistant maize seeds will be available to Kenyan farmers within the next five years. Trial GM drought-resistant cotton crops are already growing in Kidoko, 240 miles southeast of Nairobi.

Researchers and lobbyists argue that in a country so frequently stricken by food shortages, scientific advancements can put food into hungry bellies. Drought-resistant seeds and vitamin-enriched crops could be agricultural game changers, they say.

But serious concerns about viability, corporate dependency and health effects linger — even while leading research firms and NGOs do their best to smooth them over.

Agriculture dominates Kenya's economy, although more than 80 percent of its land is too dry and infertile for efficient cultivation. Kenya is the second largest seed consumer in sub-Saharan Africa, and Nairobi is a well-known hub for agricultural research. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, farming is the largest contributor to Kenya's gross domestic product, and 75 percent of Kenyans made their living by farming in 2006.

Half of the country's total agricultural output is non-marketed subsistence production — meaning farms like Kiambaa's,

where nothing is sold and everything is consumed.

On top of that, the country is still reeling from the worst drought in half a century, which affected an estimated 13 million people across the Horn of Africa in 2011. Kenya is home to the world's largest refugee camp, housing 450,000 Somalis fleeing violence and famine, increasing the pressure to deal with food security challenges.

Prime Minister Raila Odinga recently called on parliament to assist the estimated 4.8 million Kenyans, in a country of about 40 million, who still rely on government food supports, as analysts predict that this year's rainy season will be insufficient to guarantee food security.

"The situation is not good... Arid and semi-arid regions have not recovered from the drought," Odinga said.

At the African Agricultural Technology

SEEDS OF A CONTROVERSY

Genetically modified foods were first introduced on a commercial basis in the United States in the mid-1990s. The new technology made it possible to splice desirable qualities from one species into another — such as inserting the gene that keeps a flounder from freezing in cold water into a tomato for longer cold temperature storage. The usage of GM crops in the United States grew rapidly in the following years with minimal public debate. Today, more than 70 percent of the food in supermarkets have GM derivatives, including virtually all processed foods. However, GM food continues to be controversial in other parts of the world, especially in Europe and Africa. Here are some of the reasons why:

HUMAN HEALTH: The process of genetic engineering can introduce dangerous new allergens and toxins into foods, such as when Starlink, a gene-altered animal feed corn containing a potential allergen, was found in corn chips and taco shells. Questions have also been raised about the potential impact of gene transfer from GM foods to cells of the body or to bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract.

PATENTED SEEDS: Farmers have saved harvested seeds for replanting since the dawn of human agriculture 11,000 years

ON THE FARM: Kenyan farmer Fred Kiambaa (below) is worried after his last maize harvest produced a fifth of its normal yield due to a lack of water. (Above) Kiambaa's plot of land in March after he completed his harvest.



PAIGE AARHUS

Foundation (AATF), a massive NGO working on GM research and development in partnership with KARI, Regulatory Affairs Manager Dr. Francis Nang'ayo says GM crops are "substantially equivalent" to non-genetically modified foods and should be embraced as a solution to persistent drought and hunger.

In 2008, the AATF received a \$47 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This partnership involved the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and American seed giant Monsanto.

In 2005, the Water-Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) program became one of the first main partners in a program aimed at developing drought-resistant maize for small-scale African farmers. Monsanto promised to provide seeds for free. The Gates Foundation claimed at the time that biotechnology and GM crops would help end poverty and food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Gates Foundation had invested \$27.6 million in Monsanto shares.

Donors had been investing millions in KARI for decades in an effort to develop seeds that would produce pest- and disease-resistant plants and produce higher yields. Monsanto promised results, with the goal of distributing its seeds to small-scale farmers across Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

Since then WEMA's African partners have made major strides in bringing GM crops to Kenya, most notably when KARI announced in March that it is set to introduce genetically modified maize to farmers' fields by 2017. Until 2008, South Africa had been the only country using GM technology. Now Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Mali, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana are researching GM seeds and growing trial crops of cotton, maize and sorghum.

"Five years ago it was only South Africa that had a clear policy. Since then a number of countries have put their acts together by publishing policies on GM technology laws. In Kenya we're moving on to create institutional mechanisms," said Dr. Nang'ayo.

ago. But farmers who carry on this practice with GM crops can be charged with violating intellectual property rights in much the same way that people who share music files online without paying can be hauled into court. Biotech giant Monsanto has also explored the use of Terminator technology that would render harvested seeds sterile and unusable. To date, this technology has not been commercialized due to intense opposition around the world.

CONTAMINATION OF NON-GM CROPS: As the planting of genetically modified crops become more widespread, the number of incidents in which their pollen contaminates traditional or organic varieties increases. Such contamination can cost organic growers their certification and their consumers access to non-GM food. It can also lead to a lawsuit from corporations like Monsanto, which aggressively litigates against farmers whose fields have been contaminated claiming — of all things — patent infringement. Many non-GM farmers will refrain from growing certain crops in order to avoid the risk of being sued. The problems associated with crop contamination could get worse — for both humans and wildlife — as biotech companies prepare a second generation of GM crops that will produce pharmaceuticals and industrial chemicals.

INCREASED PESTICIDE USAGE: Many of Monsanto's GM crops are designed to withstand much higher doses of Roundup, Monsanto's

DEEPLY DIVIDED

But Nang'ayo and his team face several challenges. Popular opinion on the technology is deeply divided in Kenya, in large part due to suspicions about the giant foreign corporations that control it.

Monsanto-patented seeds are usually costly, which has led to numerous accusations of exploitation and contemporary colonialism. But how long will these particular strains of seeds last? What are the guarantees? Critics fear dependence on corporate fertilizers and pesticides, the emergence of super-weeds and pests that can no longer repel GM varieties, and terminator seeds that only last for one planting season.

At Seattle's AGRA Watch, a project of the Community Alliance for Global Justice, director Heather Day said there aren't enough questions being asked about introducing GM technology to developing countries.

"Our campaign started because of our concern about the Gates Foundation's influence on agriculture and the lack of transparency and accountability. We also have ecological concerns, in terms of food sovereignty and farmers' ability to control their food system. We need to be concerned about the industrialization of the agricultural system," she said.

AGRA Watch's objective is to monitor and question the Gates Foundation's push for a "green revolution" in Africa.

Monsanto has promised an indefinite supply of royalty-free seeds for this project, but Day said the pitfalls have the potential to devastate the continent's agriculture.

"Genetically modified crops actually haven't been that successful," Day said. "We've seen massive crop failure in South Africa, and farmers there couldn't get financial remedies or compensation for their losses. There's genetic resistance and superpests, these things are happening now, and it's not surprising. It's what you would expect from an ecological standpoint."

The horror stories are real — in India, for example, farmers who purchased Bollgard I cotton seeds from 2007 to 2009 wound up spending four times the price of regular seeds, and paying dearly for it. It was be-

lieved that Monsanto's patented GM seeds would be resistant to pink bollworms, which were destroying cotton crops across swaths of India, but by 2010 Monsanto officials were forced to admit that the seed had failed and a newer breed of far more aggressive pests had emerged. The solution? Bollgard II, an even stronger GM cotton seed.

COST: From higher seed price to increased pesticide and fertilizer usage, planting GM crops is more expensive and favors agribusinesses that can operate on large economies of scale. For small farmers in the Global South, the extra expenses can quickly lead to crushing debt burdens and loss of their land, especially when GM crops don't deliver their expected results.

UNFORSEEN CONSEQUENCES: After 4.5 billion years of natural evolution, the advent of genetically modified organisms represents a "second genesis" in which the planet is being repopulated by commercially patented lifeforms, says Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Biotech Century*. The potential long-term impact of these laboratory creations — from the emergence of new super-pests to the loss of genetic diversity in the natural world — is not known yet. For many skeptics, that is reason enough to proceed with caution.

— JOHN TARLETON

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As of December 2011, Monsanto was actively promoting the latest Bollgard III cotton seed, stronger than ever before. Pesticide spending in India skyrocketed between 2007 and 2009, forcing thousands of farmers into crushing debt, and hundreds more into giving up their land. Some media outlets later drew a connection between the Bollgard debacle and a rash of suicides across farms that had purchased the seeds.

LAND GRABS

Kenya is a country where land-grabbing is all too common, be it on the coast to make way for new tourist resorts, or in Nairobi, where slum demolitions left hundreds homeless when the government bulldozed several apartment buildings to reclaim an area near the Moi Air Base.

Farmers here are skeptical of risking everything for a few seasons of higher yields. In Kangundo, Kiambaa said he would try GM technology if it was a matter of life or death — but he is wary.

Kiambaa uses the Katumani breed of maize, a widely available seed that is reasonably drought-tolerant and affordable. Higher yields are tempting, of course, but Kiambaa said he doesn't want to chance his livelihood on a foreign corporation. While his family has been on the land for decades now, Kiambaa said they didn't get to farm it until British colonialists returned it to local farmers. He pointed out trees that line the steep hillside, planted by the British.

"It's because of *Mzungus* that we have charcoal," he said, smiling wryly.

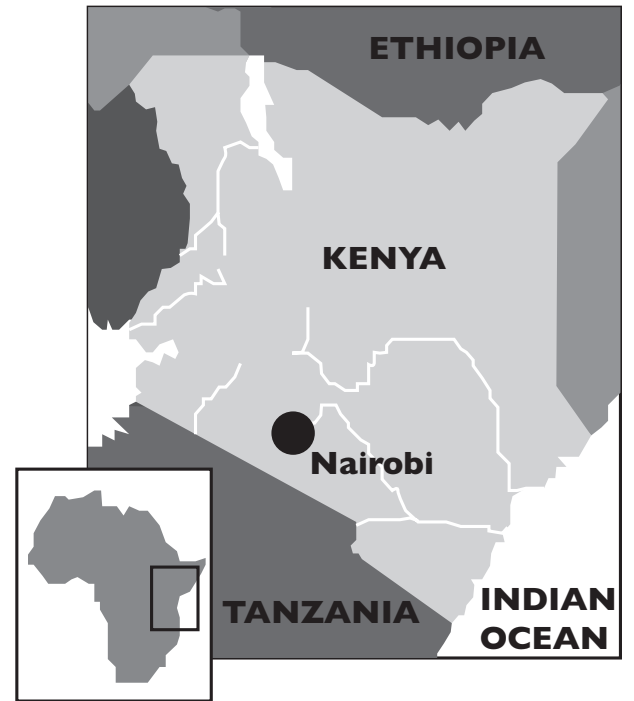
After the last harvest, Kiambaa can't even afford to use Kenya's standard DAP fertilizer, which costs 59 cents per pound. Instead, he has a lone cow tied to a post in his fields.

"This provides the fertilizer we need. We can't afford anything else. The maize yield could have been much better, but we know our plants will grow each year. It is better we keep it the way it is. My family has been on this land for 100 years. We have always survived," he said.

At the National Biosafety Authority (NBA), CEO Willy Tonui claims media hysteria and inaccurate reporting are to blame for resistance to GM technology, arguing the NBA maintains stringent guidelines about GM seeds in Kenya. Referring to the plans to allow GM maize seeds in by 2017, Tonui said, "The National Biosafety Authority does not have the mandate to introduce GM maize or any other crop into Kenya. We only review applications that are submitted to the authority. To date, the authority has not received any application on commercial release of GM maize or any other crop."

Anne Maina, advocacy coordinator for the African Biodiversity Network (ABN), a coalition of 65 Kenyan farming organizations, said that's not a good enough answer.

"Who's controlling the industry?" she asked. "If you are going to talk to the National Biosafety Authority, they'll tell you



CARVING UP AFRICA, AGAIN

Small farmers in Kenya and its African neighbors worry that the extra costs associated with using genetically modified crops will bury them in debt and force them to give up their land. If that happens, there will be many buyers ready to seize the opportunity.

The British food aid organization Oxfam reports that over the past decade 561 million acres of land in the Global South and the former Soviet Bloc have been sold, leased or licensed largely in Africa and to international investors. It's an area larger than Alaska and Texas combined. The trend has accelerated since 2008 when food prices spiked around the world and Western investors fled from the U.S. property market.

Asian and Middle Eastern countries have bought up large tracts of land in Africa to ensure their future food supply. Western investors, meanwhile, are turning to Africa to boost biofuel production by planting vast swaths of sugar cane and palm oil. In many cases, investors see their taxes waived by host governments and are allowed to produce entirely for export. Examples of land grabs include:

- China purchased 250,000 acres of agricultural land in Zimbabwe in 2008 and is investing \$800 million in Mozambique to modernize rice production for export.
- In 2008 Philippe Heilburg, a former commodities trader at AIG, leased 988,000 acres in the south of Sudan from a local warlord. Since South Sudan became its own country last year, Heilburg has leased another 740,000 acres. Heilburg's goal is to convert the land into an agricultural plantation.
- From 2006 to 2010, 22,000 Ugandans in the Kiboga and Mubende districts were violently displaced from their forest homes by local security forces after a British timber company acquired title to the land they had been farming for decades.

"The scale of the land deals being struck is shocking," Anuradha Mittal, executive director of the Oakland Institute told the (UK) *Guardian*. "The conversion of African small farms and forests into a natural-asset-based, high-return investment strategy can drive up food prices and increase the risks of climate change."

— J.T.

Continued on page 22

Food for Thought

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNA LAPPÉ

BY JOHN TARLETON

“Agriculture can be part of what protects us” from climate change, says Anna Lappé. She should know. Daughter of Frances Moore Lappé, a legendary food writer, Anna Lappé has penned three books (including one with her mother) in the past decade on food and food politics. She does all this while traveling the world and meeting with farmers, scientists and citizen activists who are creating alternatives to industrial agriculture. A resident of Brooklyn, Lappé recently shared her thoughts with *The Independent* on why a sweeping change in our food system is both necessary and doable.

JOHN TARLETON: *Much of the food we consume is bad for us and also destructive to the environment. How did this come to be?*

ANNA LAPPÉ: There’s a parallel between the industrialization of food and other sectors of our economy. We’re replacing naturally occurring elements of the food and farming systems with the fossil fuel or chemical, human made equivalents whether that’s synthetic fertilizer or toxic pesticides. When you alter the process so profoundly, you take what was a symbiotic way to grow food in concert with nature and turn it into a system that is highly polluting and has enormous planetary impacts. And at the end of the day, you produce food that isn’t good for us.

JT: *In agriculture, can we really have both sustainability and abundance? Critics of alternative agriculture would say that’s a hippie daydream.*

AL: If you actually look at the scientific literature, especially coming from countries outside of the United States, the growing global consensus on this question is clear. Four years ago, an important report came out that had been commissioned by the World Bank, the United Nations and a number of other international institutions that brought together 400 scientists and agronomists and experts in the field in dozens of countries to look at the question of how we feed the planet. The report, called the IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural

Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development), concluded that business as usual is no longer an option. Industrial agriculture is undermining every resource the system needs to produce food: water, healthy soil, a stable climate, sources of fertility. A number of other organizations — that no one would consider the stomping ground of hippies — like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Environment Program have come to similar conclusions.

JT: *What will your next project be about?*

AL: I’m currently leading the Real Food Media Project, a Web-based video series debunking core myths of industrial agriculture, starting with the big one: that industrial agriculture is efficient and sustainable farming isn’t. Our companion website will include lots of great resources and action ideas for people to get involved with groups working around the country. For this project, I’ve been doing more research on the sustainability of ecological farming and the abundance that becomes inherent and integral in that system when you are actually working in concert with nature; it’s gotten me all the more motivated to spread this message.

JT: *What are the key principles that need to be implemented to create the food system you would like to see?*

AL: When you mention principles to be introduced in the food system, I think of the political changes needed: Why is it so difficult for farmers in this country to follow ecological principles of biodiversity and soil fertility, for instance? Why do industrial livestock operators get off the hook for polluting our waterways and air while organic farmers are underappreciated for all they do to protect the environment? Why is it easier to find Funyuns than onions, or Pringles than potatoes, in many communities?

‘One of the food industry’s biggest lies about those of us who want to change the food system is that we’re trying to take all the fun out of eating and wag our finger at you.’

JT: *To what extent can we transform our food system through individual actions and actions in our local communities? And how much of this is a systemic problem that has to be confronted in a systemic manner?*

AL: It’s all of the above. The choices we make for ourselves personally and for our families make a difference — so does what we can do in our communities and as citizens of this country and working in solidarity with movements in other countries. Even if you are not working on all these levels, it’s important to keep them in mind and understand that even your personal choices can ripple out to a global level.

JT: *Is the desire to eat healthy elitist? What*



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Anna Lappé, author of *Diet for a Hot Planet*, at her home in Brooklyn.

are people who don’t have a lot of extra money to drop on organics supposed to do?

AL: You can’t talk about the price of food without talking about the decline in real wages for most working Americans since the 1970s. Look at a company like Wal-Mart where one in four food dollars is not spent in this country. It’s the largest private employer in the country. It’s extremely anti-union and pays many of its workers barely enough to feed themselves. Many of the people who are working to remake the food system are framing it as a social justice question. If you look at who is most impacted by this broken food system and by diet-related illnesses, you see that communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately affected.

JT: *How has becoming a parent affected your perspective?*

AL: From the minute I found out I was pregnant with our first daughter, I knew everything I ate was feeding my daughter already. That simple realization made me that much more conscientious about what I was eating and that much more aware of how hard it is to make healthy choices in this food environment. One hundred percent organic food? Forget about it! One hundred percent confident I was never eating genetically engineered ingredients? Impossible. It made me that much more fired up about this work.

JT: *Your daughters will come of age in a world where the climate could be dramatically altered.*

AL: It can be scary. I’m passionate about the food-climate connection because so much research confirms that ecological methods

create resilient farms better able to handle weather extremes and at the same time significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture can be a part of what helps protect us.

JT: *Is that a part of what draws a lot of people into food activism — the sense of being able to affect change in a very real and tangible way?*

AL: Yes, there are so many entry points. And it is so empowering. One of the food industry’s biggest lies about those of us who want to change the food system is that we’re trying to take all the fun out of eating and wag our finger at you. I’ve met thousands of people who are engaged in this work and have changed how they eat as a result. I have never met more energized, empowered, happy people. It feels great to be healthy. It feels great to eat good food and it feels great to take power into your own hands about what you put into your body.

JT: *What is the significance of all the food activism going on here in New York?*

AL: One of the things that gives me so much hope is the activism here in New York City and across the country. For example, thousands of New Yorkers, including my family, are members of CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture programs), where you invest in a farm at the beginning of the season and benefit from the harvest throughout the year. My two-and-a-half-year-old daughter tasted her first peaches and blackberries, plums and tomatoes, spinach and kale, directly from our local CSA farmer. As a mom, the peace of mind I got knowing exactly where her food came from was pretty incredible.

For more on Anna Lappé, see smallplanet.org.

Affirming the Outsider's Eye

ADRIENNE RICH'S LEGACY

BY JESSICA MAX STEIN

The 1960s found Adrienne Rich, like many women of her generation, plagued by disillusion.

Born in Baltimore in 1929, Rich quickly achieved success by mainstream literary and patriarchal standards. She was just 22, a senior at Radcliffe College, when W. H. Auden chose her first book, *A Change of World*, for the Yale Younger Poets prize. At 24 she married Alfred Haskell Conrad, a Harvard economist, and bore three sons by age 30.

Yet Rich, like many women of her generation, envisioned something different. "It was only when I could finally affirm the outsider's eye as the source of a legitimate and coherent vision," she wrote in "What Does a Woman Need to Know?" (1979), "that I began to be able to do the work I truly wanted to do, live the kind of life I truly wanted to live." This may sound simple in hindsight, knowing what literary triumphs Rich wrought; at the time, it must have been terrifying.

Rich's poem "Song" (1971) encapsulates this tentative independence. "You're wondering if I'm lonely," the poem opens. The narrator doesn't deny loneliness, yet compares the condition to a series of images, nearly all in directed motion: a plane honing in on its destination, "a woman driving across country," even a remarkably self-aware rowboat "that knows what it is/that knows it's... wood, with a gift for burning." Sure, I'm lonely, the narrator seems to say, but I know what I'm here to do and I'm doing it.

In 1970 Rich's husband, from whom she had become estranged, committed suicide. In 1976 Rich moved in with the writer Michelle Cliff, who remained her partner until Rich's death in March at the age of 82.

SURVIVOR

By dint of her life and work, Rich disproved the lie of the self-destructive woman artist. About Anne Sexton, "a poet and a suicide," Rich wrote: "We have had enough suicidal women poets, enough suicidal women, enough of self-destructiveness as the sole form of violence permitted to women." She quotes Tillie Olsen at the essay's conclusion: "Every woman who writes is a survivor."

It is interesting to remember that Rich is of the same generation as Sylvia Plath, a writer perhaps more famous for her suicide than for her art. The poets crossed paths at Harvard in 1958, when Rich and her husband attended a reading by Plath's husband Ted Hughes; the two couples went out to dinner afterwards.

Plath, fiercely competitive, counted Rich among her primary rivals. In a 1950s letter to her mother, Plath writes:

"I think I have written lines which qualify me to be the poetess of America. Who rivals? Well, in history Sappho, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Amy Lowell, Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay — all dead. Now... May Swen-

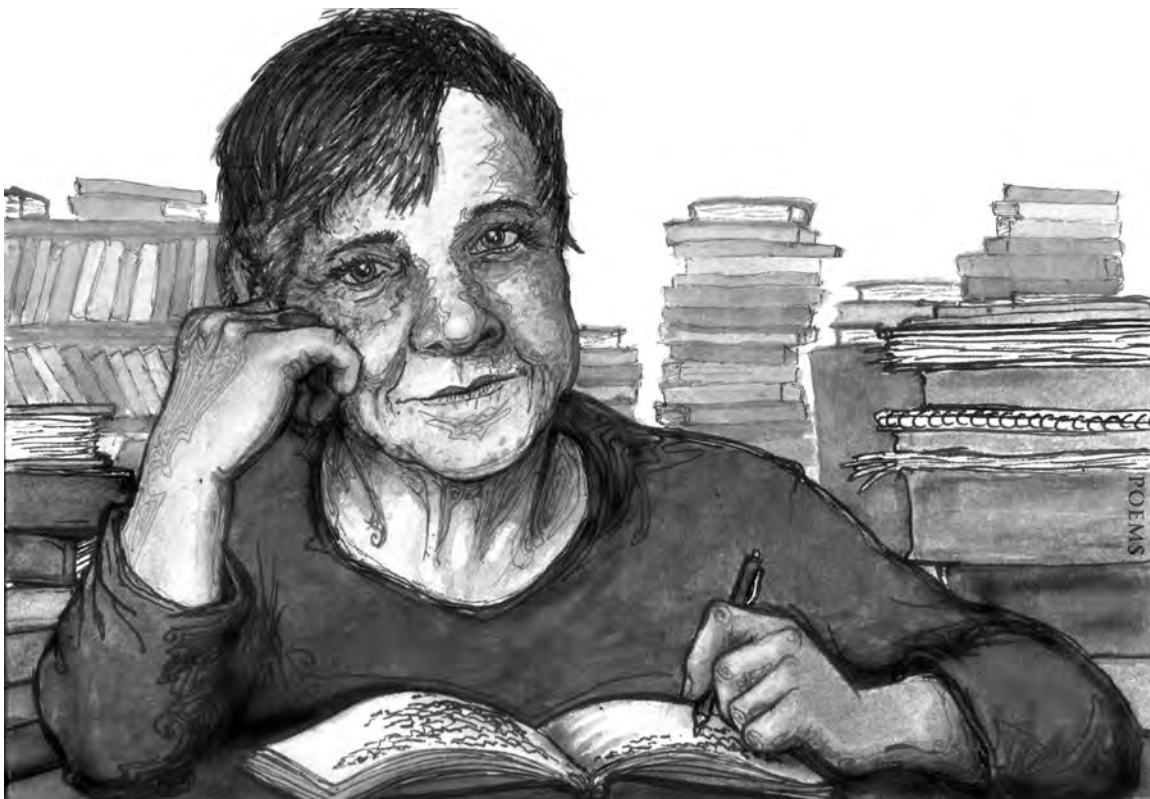
son, Isabella Gardner, and the most close, Adrienne Cecile Rich — who will soon be eclipsed by these eight poems."

The myth of Plath embodies the archetype of the suicidal woman poet, the moody, brooding, black-clad artist. Why does this myth persist? Even Ted Hughes wrote — though perhaps for the wrong reasons — "The Fantasia about Sylvia Plath is more needed than the facts. Where that leaves respect for the truth of her life... I do not know."

In 1963 Sylvia Plath put her head in the oven, and Adrienne Rich published *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, cited by many critics as her first book in her signature voice. She went on to write for another 50 years.

COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY

Though known primarily as a poet, Adrienne Rich wrote six collections of lucid, necessary essays in addition to her dozen poetry volumes. Particularly important is



Rich's 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," exposing the ways in which "heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women." The concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" influenced, and has been incorporated into, so much of the ensuing feminist thought, that we forget just how fundamental it is.

For this and similar views, some have written off Rich as an essentialist, "second wave" feminist. This is a disservice to the breadth of her vision. Even in "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Rich posits a broad, flexible "lesbian continuum" roomy enough to fit everything from "the impudent, intimate girl friendships of eight or nine" to marriage resisters to "the woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women" in a way that seems to presage, or at least make room for, the more flexible and self-defined queer identities that came afterward.

Rich also wrote about "intersectionality" — the idea that systems of oppression are interrelated, rather than experienced independently — decades before it became a progressive buzzword. In "Resisting Amnesia" (1983), she writes, "We all need to begin with the individual consciousness: How did we come to be where we are and

not elsewhere?"

This focus on identity politics — a concept that embraces the lived experience of oppressed people — underlines much of Rich's work. Yet identity politics do not exist in isolation. In the same essay, Rich posits that we must "move from an individual experience to a collective one," and understand our subjective experience in a larger context. For example, she writes in "Disobedience and Women's Studies" (1981), "Feminism became a political and spiritual base from which I could move to examine rather than try to hide my own racism." Rather than solipsism, identity politics can foster the empathetic understanding needed for action.

Amidst all this, let us not forget that Rich was, without hyperbole, a great poet, from the meticulous, tightly crafted formality of her early work to the increasingly spare free verse of her later pieces. Her use of breath and rhythm echoes the best of Elizabeth Bishop, or of Gerard Manley Hopkins

winning her first poetry prize, Rich turned down a National Medal of Arts from the Clinton administration. "Art — in my own case the art of poetry — means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage," she wrote to Jane Alexander, then chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, which oversees the award.

In the end, Rich didn't write to garner external accolades or to produce meaningless ornamental language. She had questions to explore and truths to speak, articulating them with clarity, lucidity and beauty. In "Diving Into the Wreck" (1973), she writes, "The words are purposes./The words are maps./I came to see the damage that was done/and the treasures that prevail."

Thank you, Adrienne Rich, for being one of those treasures.

From 1999 to 2007, Jessica Max Stein was an editorial collective member (and for the last two years poetry editor) of Bridges: a Jewish Feminist Journal, co-founded in 1990 by Adrienne Rich. For more of Stein's work, see jessicamaxstein.com.

TWO POEMS BY ADRIENNE RICH

SONG

You're wondering if I'm lonely:
OK then, yes, I'm lonely
as a plane rides lonely and level
on its radio beam, aiming
across the Rockies
for the blue-strung aisles
of an airfield on the ocean.

You want to ask, am I lonely?
Well, of course, lonely
as a woman driving across country
day after day, leaving behind
mile after mile
little towns she might have stopped
and lived and died in, lonely

If I'm lonely
it must be the loneliness
of waking first, of breathing
dawn's first cold breath on the city
of being the one awake
in a house wrapped in sleep

If I'm lonely
it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore
in the last red light of the year
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
ice nor mud nor winter light
but wood, with a gift for burning.

TURBULENCE

There'll be turbulence. You'll drop
your book to hold your
water bottle steady. Your
mind, mind has mountains, cliffs of fall
may who ne'er hung there let him
watch the movie. The plane's
supposed to shudder, shoulder on
like this. It's built to do that. You're
designed to tremble too. Else break
Higher you climb, trouble in mind
lungs labor, heights hurl vistas
Oxygen hangs ready
overhead. In the event put on
the child's mask first. Breathe normally

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ZEITGEIST FILMS

Owing Me, Owing You

Payback
DIRECTED BY JENNIFER BAICHWAL
ZEITGEIST FILMS, 2012

Taking her cue from Margaret Atwood's 2008 essay collection *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, director Jennifer Baichwal marshals a patchwork of stories — from a North Albanian vendetta and the Gulf oil spill to the vision behind Pennsylvania's Eastern State Penitentiary and the South Florida Coalition of Immokalee Workers' struggles against slave labor — that explore the manifold imprints of debt that stain the fabric of Western civilization. However, given the obvious good intentions and craftsmanship, one is left wondering why *Payback* didn't turn out to be a better film.

Recurrent scenes of Atwood preparing and delivering a lecture on the topic of debt fail to adequately connect the featured stories. None of them stem from her work and their selection feels so scattershot that the film ends up less than the sum of its parts. The alternation of the writer reading before a live audience and the sound of her typing as she puts her ideas down on the page is quite evocative, but Baichwal's reluctance to probe the genesis of Atwood's prose more di-

rectly proves a letdown and gives *Payback* an impersonal tone. Even in the many interviews, she refrains from establishing close connections with her subjects (almost all likable, intelligent individuals). A sole, moving exception is the atonement of Paul Mohammed, a Pakistani ex-convict caught in a vicious cycle of drug addiction and jail fueled by his shame over robbing an old lady who now lives in mortal fear of him. How has prison fulfilled Mohammed's debt to society, especially after we hear from his mother about the racist abuse he underwent as a child?

Payback lifts the veil, but only to skim the surface of complex circumstances. The cinematography revels in crisp, picturesque

down theory of economics.)

Even though our species now owes the planet on an unprecedented scale (in the film, William Rees posits the inadequacy of capitalism in the face of a mounting ecological deficit), debt remains, as Atwood asserts, a highly subjective, people-oriented principle: "how we think about it changes how it works," as does how we think about others. Have we ever felt less intrinsically indebted to — or more free not to care about — the lot of our fellow humans? In *Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the Global Economy*, which includes a far more detailed take on Immokalee farm worker activism than *Payback* provides, John Bowe

Payback lifts the veil on how we think about debt only to skim the surface of complex circumstances.

states that "in 1970, 79 percent of American college fresh-

men said their primary goal in life was to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. In 2005, 75 percent said their primary objective was to be financially very well off." It behooves us to heed Georg Simmel's seminal insight (from *The Philosophy of Money*) that our condition is "composed of both a measure of obligation and a measure of freedom" in such a way that one is "realized in content, the other in form." Therefore debt cannot be resolved, it can only be displaced. Or, as Paul Mohammed reflects, you can put the person in prison, but the problem remains.

—KENNETH CRAB

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Organized

Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times
BY AMY SONNIE AND JAMES TRACY
MELVILLE HOUSE, 2011

Race vs. class. Which matters more? Is gentrification an issue of race or class? How is a middle-class person of color's experience of oppression different from a poor white person's?

For the left, this conversation never ends. The question isn't answered because it can't be answered: race and class oppression are so fundamental to the structure of American society that our very identities are made up of the injuries we experience because of them. Neither matters more; both must be tackled together, along with gender oppression — also inseparable.

Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power focuses on an overlooked handful of organizations that tried to do just that. By shining a light on the work of white working-class organizations from the '60s and '70s, the authors provide a powerful counterbalance to the class-biased conventional history of the racial justice struggles of that era — a familiar story in which a small group of white (middle-class) college activists supported the work of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Panthers while poor and working-class whites were apathetic bystanders or part of the problem.

After 10 years of interviewing activists from these groups, and the people-of-color-led organizations they worked with, authors James Tracy and Amy Sonnie have put together a fascinating and scrupulously researched argument that white working-class groups played a crucial role in demanding justice for poor people of all races and ethnic identities. These groups included folks like the JOIN (Jobs or Income Now) Community Union in Chicago, which united Southern migrants, student radicals and welfare recipients to fight for housing, health and welfare; the October 4th organization of residents of industrial Philadelphia against brutal cops, big business and the Vietnam War; White Lightning in the Bronx; and the Young Patriots Organization and Rising Up Angry, which brought proud self-identified "white trash" and "hillbillies" together with Chicago greasers, Vietnam veterans and young feminists. These groups later formed a legendary "Rainbow Coalition" (years be-

fore Jesse Jackson) with Black and Puerto Rican activists. Tactically, their work was similar to that of the Panthers and other radical racial justice groups, combining direct services with base-building, political education, direct action and other community empowerment strategies.

Vivid and sometimes-startling stories bring this history to life: Black nationalists provided security for meetings of white-identified groups; the Chicago Black Panther field secretary was arrested under shady circumstances by cops who planned to "disappear" him, only to see a huge crowd of poor white allies surround the squad car and secure his release.



The book's claims are ultimately modest. The authors don't present these organizations as the mainstream of white working-class thought in the '60s and '70s. They don't pretend that class oppression and even radical class consciousness automatically translate into progressive ideas about race, or that these groups didn't have their own issues to work through. The book presents the success of movements like the Rainbow Coalition as simultaneously a sign of the power and potential of the work of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, and concurrently, an alarm that triggered the government's massive and violent war on Black nationalism. Failure didn't destroy these movements — success did. Power gets truly nervous when people start working together across race lines.

While some tricks that worked for these groups won't work for organizers today (the authors caution against attempting to re-appropriate the Confederate flag, as the Young Patriots Organization did), the book is a solid toolbox of tactics for today's activists.

"[Rising Up] Angry viewed gang kids and greasers as part of a po-

tentially radical underclass. They adopted the Panther view that the 'lumpenproletariat' — the most marginally employed or disenfranchised — would become the vanguard of the revolution."

This is an important perspective that's still overlooked today: witness the discomfort of Occupy Wall Street protesters with their homeless comrades, or the more general difficulties the left has faced when working with and taking leadership from the most marginalized communities.

The working-class organizations and alliances profiled in this book might have been a minority, and their influence may have been limited. But they provide a valuable vision of a left that could have been. The work of these organizations is diametrically opposed to that of the Saul Alinsky organizing model, which focuses on modest "winnable" campaigns and shies away from complex issues like individual racism and misogyny that could create divisions inside an organizing community. The groups profiled in *Hillbilly Nationalists* tackled racism and bigotry in their own communities and fought for big-picture substantive change in partnership with their oppressed brothers and sisters. The Alinsky model has dominated the activist end of the Democratic Party for decades now, and while today's organizers have the benefit of hindsight in assessing those failures, there has also been a shortage of alternatives.

One of the things that's so exciting about this book is that it comes at a time when the left has largely ceded the white working class to the right. Many of the activists profiled in this book believe that the failure of the white left to build power with working-class whites was a "fatal flaw" that could have changed the course of American history. The right has spent the past 30 years courting the rural working class on issues of individual rights, security and family values, all while building a base that has allowed them to shift the conversation in catastrophic ways. We make a mistake in believing that the Tea Party speaks for all poor whites — but that's why we need *Hillbilly Nationalists* so badly. This book digs up a long and vibrant history of radical working-class resistance that we can still tap into if we understand it better.

—SAM J. MILLER

Sam J. Miller is a writer and a community organizer. He is the co-editor of *Horror After 9/11* and can be contacted at samjmill-er79@yahoo.com.

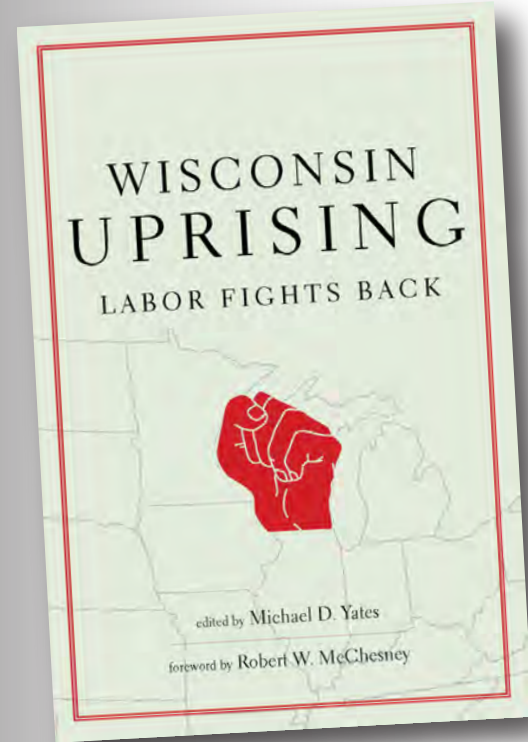
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Frankenfoods

Continued from page 17

the information is available, but there is a confidential business information clause where whoever is controlling the industry is not held accountable. The level of secrecy and lack of transparency is unacceptable.”

FARMERS’ NEEDS

The ABN has actively lobbied the government since 2004 to crack down on GM technology slowly filtering into Kenya, with some measure of success. A 2009 Biosafety Act required all GM imports to pass stringent government standards before entering the country.

Maina recognizes the uphill battle she’s facing.

“Our public research institutions must shift their focus back to farmers’ needs,” she told *The Independent*, “rather than support the agenda of agribusiness, which is to colonize our food and seed chain. We believe that the patenting of seed is deeply unethical

and dangerous.”

Joan Baxter is a journalist who has spent years reporting on climate change and agriculture in Africa. Reporting now from Sierra Leone, Baxter was quick to point out that even if a farmer chooses not to use GM technology, it won’t guarantee crop safety.

“Farmers are always at risk of contamination from GM seeds. That has been shown in North America. The farmers [in Africa] may lose their own seeds, perhaps be given GM seeds for a year or two, then have to purchase them and be stuck in the trap and in debt,” she said.

Like Maina, Baxter sees a problem in how GM technology is being marketed, and slowly introduced, into African countries, under the guise of ending famine. With climate change becoming an increasingly influential factor in the GM debate, Baxter said companies claiming to help are only looking for profit.

“Basically this is disaster capitalism. The disaster of hunger and drought, climate change and policy-related, is now a profit

opportunity for Monsanto and Syngenta. The Gates Foundation buying shares in Monsanto tells you what the real agenda is: To get GMOs in Africa,” she said.

In 2010, NBA’s CEO resigned after it was revealed that 280,000 tonnes of GM maize had found its way into Kenya from South Africa through the Port of Mombasa.

Farmers mobilized en masse after the Dreyfus scandal (named for the South African company responsible for shipping the seeds) was revealed, marching on Parliament to demand an end to secret imports. After the most recent GM announcement, however, there were no protests. The long rains that would ensure a good yield haven’t come. The drought may continue.

Added to the potential problems with GM technology are health risks—the strains of maize that were illegally imported in 2010 had been deemed unsafe for children and the elderly. Maina also worries about animal feeding trials that showed damage to liver, kidney and pancreas, effects on fertility, and stomach bleeding in livestock that has consumed GM feed. A more recent study carried out on pregnant women in Canada found genetically modified insecticidal proteins in their blood streams and in that of their unborn children, despite assurances from scientists that it wasn’t possible.

The political scandal that erupted after 2010’s illegal imports brought GM technology into the forefront of Kenyan public debate, but last year’s massive drought has shifted public and political discourse. The ABN doesn’t have a \$47 million grant to keep it going, and the pressures it faces from politicians and corporations, now waging their own propaganda war, are overwhelming.

GM TREADMILL

At the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health in Toronto, researchers re-

cently released a report titled “Factors in the adoption and development of agro-biotechnology in sub-Saharan Africa.” The report,

which was financed by a grant by the Gates Foundation, came to the conclusion that “poor communication is affecting agbiotech adoption,” and that “widespread dissemination of information at the grassroots level and can spread misinformation and create extensive public concern and distrust for agbiotech initiatives.”

Lead researcher Obidimma Ezezikwa declined to comment on Monsanto’s involvement with GM technology, and denied that his team was creating corporate propaganda.

“I think it is important to actively and soberly engage in the debate by offering facts to the policy makers, media and public on ag-biotech which will dispel fears and anxieties,” he told *The Independent*.

The mounting evidence, health questions and political scandals all mean Kenya would be wisest to take a step back before jumping on board the GM train, says Maina.

“Our key concern is that the development of insecticides and pesticides is primarily the emergence of companies getting farmers to buy highly toxic chemicals, which they will become totally dependent on. We don’t yet know the extent of the health risks posed, nor how we are expected to trust companies that have a record of putting small farmers out of business. It is time for sober second thought,” she said.

Paige Aarhus is a Canadian journalist based in Nairobi. She’s written for Vice Magazine, The Globe and Mail, The Daily Nation and The National Post, and reported from India, France, Sudan, Congo and across East Africa.



UNCERTAIN FUTURE: Kenya is one of many African nations that could be severely affected by climate change.

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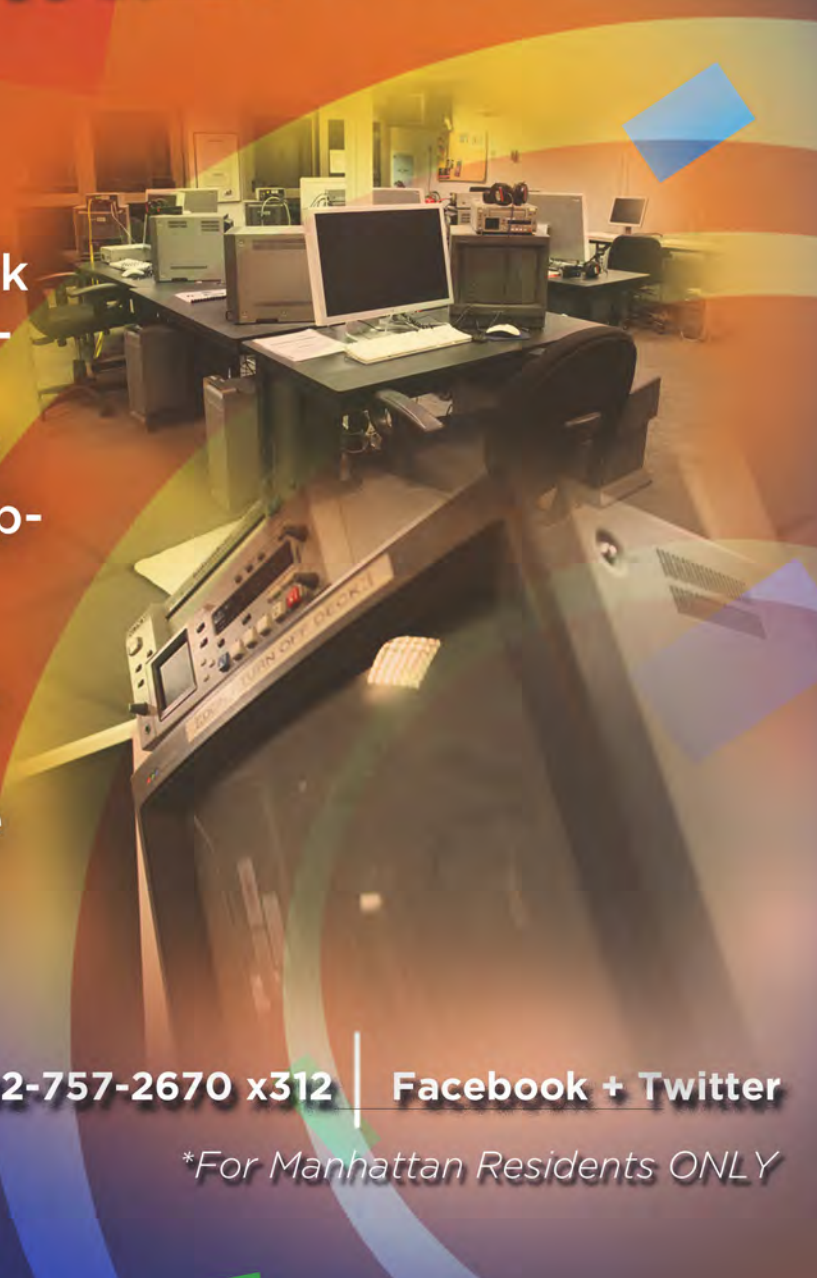
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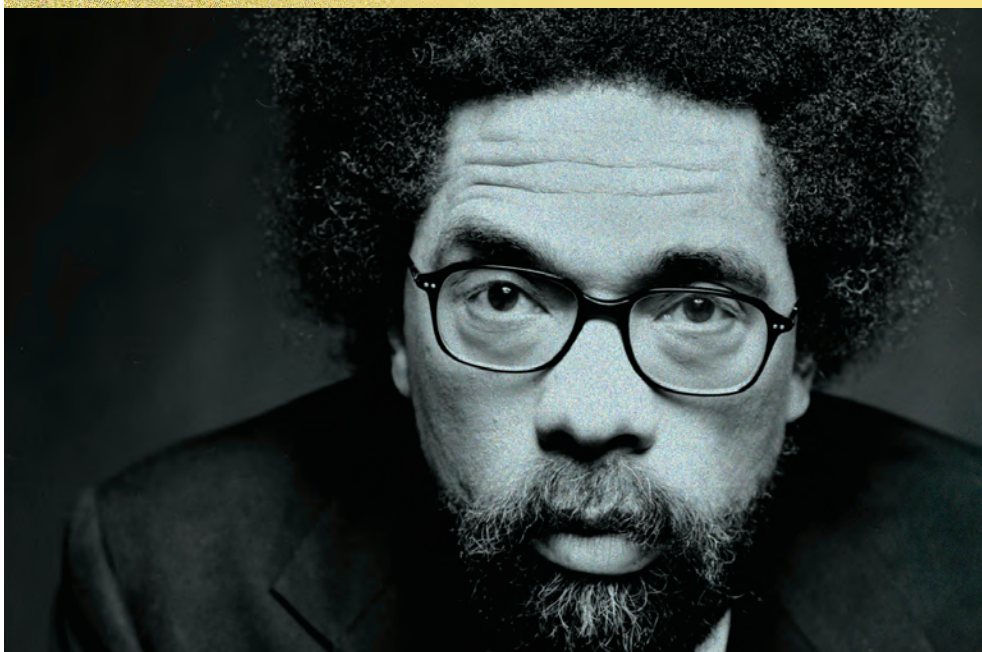
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